

The Sanctuary ***The Heavenly Sanctuary***

Lesson #1 for October 5, 2013

Scriptures: Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalms 89:14; Revelation 4&5; Psalm 11:4-7; Deuteronomy 25:1; Hebrews 8:1-2.

1. The Old Testament sanctuary was supposed to teach mankind important truths about the coming life and death of Jesus as well as the meaning of His ministry. Does it also teach us important lessons about the character of God? The meaning of sin? And the plan of salvation? After the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29,36, *GNB*) What was implied by that? Christians and especially Seventh-day Adventists have relied on the book of Hebrews to give us an understanding of the sanctuary system of the Old Testament. What are we supposed to learn from that book? Does the book of Hebrews aid in your understanding of why Jesus came and why He had to die?

The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.—*The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

2. It was an understanding of the annual events of the ancient Jewish sanctuary system that have helped us understand what happened on October 22, 1844, in fulfillment of Daniel 8:14 and 9:24-27. Our understanding of the relationship between the sanctuary teachings from the Old Testament and those two prophecies from the book of Daniel is unique in the Christian world. Have we correctly understood the meaning and importance of this relationship?

All who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to [489] everyone that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them. [1 Peter 3:15]

The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. (GC 488.3-489.1) [Content in brackets is supplied.]

3. Have we correctly understood that intercession in the sanctuary above? What is Christ doing now in the heavenly sanctuary? A misunderstanding of His work in the heavenly sanctuary can easily lead us to an almost-pagan understanding of God.

All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill. (GC 488.2)

4. The purpose of this lesson is to ask the basic, essential, and important questions about the Bible’s teaching on the sanctuary—both the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary. A six-year-old child once asked, “Where does God live?”

This innocent question of a six-year-old could be quite perplexing. It could easily lead to more difficult ones, such as, “If God lives in one place, how is it

possible that He is everywhere?" Or, "Does God need a dwelling place?" Or, "If He doesn't need one, why does He have one?" Or, "If He does need one, why does He need it?" (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for September 28)

5. The Old Testament is full of many details about the tabernacle/sanctuary that was built at the foot of Mount Sinai and the subsequent sanctuaries built by Solomon and later by the returnees after the Babylonian captivity which was expanded by Herod into that great second temple in which Jesus Himself taught on many occasions.
6. When Moses and his associates finished the tabernacle/sanctuary in the Sinai desert, God's presence entered that sanctuary for a period of time so that not even Moses could go in. (Exodus 40:34-35) When Solomon finished his years of constructing that magnificent temple on Mount Moriah which has sometimes been called the most magnificent building ever erected on this earth, God once again entered that building; the dazzling light of the Lord's presence prevented even the priests from entering it for some time. (1 Kings 8:10-11)
7. Read Haggai 2:8-9. The very small temple that was constructed after the return from Babylonian captivity was never honored by God's dazzling glory. But, God through Haggai promised that that second temple would be honored by something greater than Solomon's earlier temple. What was it?

For centuries the Jews had vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God given by Haggai had been fulfilled; yet pride and unbelief blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh. The "Desire of all nations" had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. But Israel had put from her the proffered Gift of heaven. With the humble Teacher who had that day passed out from its golden gate, the glory had forever departed from the temple. Already were the Saviour's words fulfilled: "Your house is left unto you desolate." Matthew 23:38. (*Great Controversy* 24.2)

8. So, what are we to learn from all of that? Exodus 25:8 tells us that way back in Moses' day, the purpose of the sanctuary was that God wanted to dwell with man. In Jesus' own words, John 15:15 tells us that He wants us no longer to be His servants but to be His friends.
9. We believe that God is omnipresent—that He is everywhere. (Jeremiah 23:23-24; Psalm 139; Acts 17:27-28) Not only that, but also we believe God is omniscient and that He has neither beginning nor end. (Psalm 90:2; Jude 25) Did Moses see God's home in heaven?
10. In what sense does God have a home? And where is that home? (1 Kings 8:30,43,49) Are we to understand that God has a "special presence" at some spot in the universe while everywhere else He has only a "general presence"? Is God physically everywhere? Or, is He just aware of everything that happens everywhere, and in that sense He is present there?
11. The Bible clearly presents the idea that there is a distinct sanctuary structure in heaven. (1 Kings 8:27; John 14:1-3; Hebrews 8:2; Acts 7:55-56; Revelation 4:2-3) While we believe that God made human beings in His own image, (Genesis 1:26-27) somehow, we have to fit that with John 4:24 which says that "God is Spirit." We need to be honest to admit that we do not understand all of this. Is it safe for us to trust something that we do not fully understand? Of course, we will never fully understand everything about God. But, read John 15:15; 16:25-27.
12. Read Psalm 47:6-9; 93:1-2; and 103:19. The ancient idea of kings being absolute sovereigns over their subjects is almost unthinkable in our day. What are we supposed to think about God as a king? What kind of king would ask His subjects to be His friends? (John 15:15)

13. All we have to do is look at the reign of Louis XIV and his predecessors to recognize that hereditary monarchies are not always a good thing! By contrast, God always rules with righteousness and justice. (Psalm 89:14; 97:2) These are the characteristics that we should manifest as well. (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 59:14)

As in obedience to His natural laws the earth should produce its treasures, so in obedience to His moral law the hearts of the people were to reflect the attributes of His character.—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 144.

14. Read Revelation 4&5. The book of Revelation is a challenge for readers. Not only does one have to understand many symbols from the Old Testament, but also one must read the book multiple times in order to really begin to understand what it is telling him. Revelation 2&3 talk about the churches that Paul helped to establish in Asia Minor. They also symbolize the churches at different time periods down through history. There were a lot of problems in those churches. But, when we turn to Revelation 4&5 and John is given a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, we come to realize that in the setting of the great controversy the primary audience is not here on this earth but in the heavenly court. While we here on this earth may be the trouble spot in the universe, the rebellion started next to God in the very sanctuary in heaven! (Revelation 12:7-12) Lucifer/Satan used to stand beside the throne of God. Thus it is that the questions that have been raised about God in the great controversy; the accusations that have been made against Him must be clarified to the satisfaction of the heavenly court before God can think about dealing with rebellion and sin here on this planet. Fortunately for us, God has chosen to answer those questions not only to the satisfaction of the heavenly council but also in a way that is meaningful, satisfying, and convincing to those who are willing to study His Word and understand the context of the great controversy here among us.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)

Christ took upon Himself humanity, and laid down His life a sacrifice, that man, by becoming a partaker of the divine nature, might have eternal life.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 141.

15. So, how is it that we become partakers of the divine nature? *Great Controversy* p. 555 says that happens as “by beholding we become changed.”
16. But, the sanctuary in heaven is much more than God’s dwelling place. It is also His judgment seat (Daniel 7:9,10) where hundreds of millions of angels are in attendance. God will not only judge the righteous but also the wicked, vindicating the righteous and condemning the wicked, allowing them to reap the natural consequences of their own behavior. God’s judgment may seem to have been delayed a long time; but, it will certainly come. (Habakkuk 2:1-5)
17. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe the time of the pre-advent judgment began on October 22, 1844. Starting with Adam, every human being has been or will be judged in that pre-

advent judgment.

18. Read Hebrews 8:1-2. What does it mean to say that Christ is serving as our High Priest at the right hand of God in the heavenly sanctuary? (Hebrews 9:24) Was it necessary for Christ to come down to this earth and experience our human condition in order to represent us before the Father in heaven? (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16) Is our only safety in the fact that while the Father does not understand our temptations, Jesus does, and He pleads on our behalf? See John 16:25-26.
19. There is an interesting aspect of the book of Revelation that most people have overlooked. Every section in that book is introduced by a scene from the heavenly sanctuary. Revelation 1:12-20 talk about the lampstands. Revelation 4&5 talk about the throne, the lamps, the sea, the slain Lamb, the blood, and the golden bowls of incense. Revelation 8:2-6 talk about the continual service of intercession being carried on. Revelation 11:19 opens before us the most holy place where the ark of the covenant is located in the second compartment. The tabernacle is open once again as we are introduced to the seven bowls or vials of God's wrath in Revelation 15:5-8. In Revelation 20&21, the entire holy city comes down out of heaven to this earth. But, we are surprised to discover that in that holy city, there is no temple. Revelation 21:22 (GNB) says, "Its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."

The abiding place of the King of kings, where thousand thousands minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him (Daniel 7:10); that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory. Yet important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work there carried forward for man's redemption were taught by the earthly sanctuary and its services.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

20. And once again, we are challenged to ask ourselves what are the important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and our salvation that we are supposed to learn from the earthly sanctuaries? The book of Revelation seems to suggest that God's government and His character are spread out transparently before His entire universal family. Why is that so important? Is it because Satan's side is so deceptive in everything it does? Is it because God is determined that when the great controversy is over, no one not even those who perish including Satan himself will have any questions left about God's fairness? (Philippians 2:5-11)
21. In this lesson we have discovered that there seem to be five main functions of the heavenly sanctuary: 1) It is God's dwelling place; 2) It is the command center for the universe; 3) It is a place of continual worship and praise; 4) It is the location of God's throne where He carries out His judgments; and 5) It is a center from which God offers to a world in rebellion His plan of salvation. Does all of this help us to understand something about why God wants to dwell among us? (Exodus 25:8) Do you agree with Ellen White's statement made in 1906 that "the correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."—*Evangelism*, p. 221. [Letter addressed to G. C. Tenney while at Battle Creek, 1906]
22. Has looking at all these aspects of the heavenly sanctuary made you more comfortable with God as a Friend? Or, do many of these details scare you?

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