

The Tabernacle



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 35:1–36:7, Gen. 1:1, Exod. 36:8–39:31, Heb. 7:25, Exod. 40:1–38, John 1:14.*

Memory Text: “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. . . . For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (*Exod. 40:34, 38, NKJV*).

The principal task of God's people in the Old Testament (as well as for us today) was to live in close relationship with the Lord; to worship and serve Him; and, also, to present the right picture of God to others (*Deut. 4:5–8*).

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hid from God because their sin made them afraid of Him. Sinfulness makes humans naturally afraid of God, and this fear twists our view of His character. The good news is that God takes the first step to span this rift and, on His initiative, He repairs the gap and the broken relationship. He calls the sinner back to Himself: “‘Where are you?’ ” (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*).

Thus, our primary mission is to present the correct character of God and His loving and righteous acts to those around us. When people are attracted to God and are convinced of His unselfish love toward them, they will give their lives to Him and obey what He tells them to do, knowing that it is for their own good.

The sanctuary demonstrated God's closeness to humanity and revealed the greatest truths to them, which is how He saves those who come to Him in faith.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

The Sabbath of the Lord

However much those opposed to the seventh-day Sabbath argue, falsely, that it was for the Jews only (the seventh day was set apart and sanctified in Eden [see *Gen. 2:1–3*]); or they argue, falsely, that the Jews first heard about it at Sinai (the Jews were keeping the Sabbath before Sinai [see *Exod. 16:22–29*])—there is no question that the Sabbath was very much a part of the life of the Hebrew people from the start.

Read Exodus 35:1–3. What truth was reiterated to the people here in the context of the building of the sanctuary?

The Sabbath and its message was, is, and always will be about God—who He is and what His mighty works are. The Sabbath reminds us of His creative and salvific acts and focuses our attention on God, who wants to dwell with His people. In this way, the Sabbath and the sanctuary point in the same direction: God’s presence in our lives.

The Sabbath of the Old Testament church conveys a manifold message. One may summarize its essence in five crucial points:

1. *God is the Creator*, and the Bible opens with this stunning and cornerstone proclamation (*Gen. 1:1*). The vivid memorial of God’s creation is the Sabbath (*Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:8–11*). From this truth—God as our Creator—all other biblical truths flow.
2. *The Messiah will come*, and this hope centers on God’s promise of the Seed, who would overcome the serpent (Satan) and bring victory over evil.
3. *God will establish His kingdom, and the Sabbath is its foretaste.*
4. *Salvation comes from the Lord*, and God’s people testify that God is their Savior and Redeemer and that salvation comes as a result of His grace and His grace alone.
5. *God is the ultimate Judge of all people. Those who persistently defy and deny Him will have no future, but He freely gives eternal life to those who follow Him.*

The Jews have a saying: *More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel.* Though we as Adventists probably wouldn’t express it like that, what important role does the Sabbath have in the life of our church family?

Offerings and the Spirit

Read Exodus 35:4–36:7. What important lessons are here for us today?

An abundance of various precious materials was needed to build the tabernacle, and it was accomplished by generous donations from God's people, who gave from the bottom of their hearts, willingly and with joy. They gave gold, silver, bronze, fine linen, precious stones, unique fabrics, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, and many other needed items. People also donated their labor because many specific objects needed to be crafted through their artistic and diligent work on the tent or its furniture. Also, tailors had to weave garments for the priests, who would be ministering in the tabernacle, and for the high priest, whose very elaborate garments included a breastplate and turban.

God had abundantly blessed the Israelites through the gifts that the Egyptians had given them on their departure from Egypt. Now it was their opportunity to give offerings of gratitude for God's merciful and mighty leadership, and their hearts were moved to accomplish this work to His glory.

The people were giving with such joy and abundance that Moses was told: " 'The people are bringing more than enough' " (*Exod. 36:5, NIV*). So, Moses had to stop their donations "because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work" on the tabernacle (*Exod. 36:7, NIV*).

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God equipped and empowered the people to accurately build the tabernacle. Bezalel, Aholiab, and others were "filled . . . with the Spirit of God" (*Exod. 35:31, NKJV*), which means that they were endowed with skills, wisdom, and artistic knowledge to perfectly do all the work. It was an enormous project and had to be created exactly according to the model God showed Moses.

It is significant that the gift of the Holy Spirit was related to people's different abilities and skills, which needed to be employed in building the tabernacle. To be filled with the Spirit is not a magical process and does not mean that special spiritual forces are within humans. To advance God's cause and fulfill His mission, God empowers His followers to accomplish His objectives and to do it well.

What spiritual gifts have you received when you were filled with the Holy Spirit? Remember that the spiritual gifts can flourish only when you cultivate the fruits of the Spirit in your life (*Gal. 5:22, 23*).

The Tabernacle Built

Skim through Exodus 36:8–39:31. Why do you think such explicit instructions were given? What does this teach us about how God cares about every detail?

Moses carefully constructed the tabernacle, and the instructions he had received on Mount Sinai were diligently implemented. The biblical text enumerates the following: (1) the tabernacle with its different fabrics, curtains, and parts (*Exod. 36:8–38*); (2) the ark (*Exod. 37:1–9*); (3) the table for the showbread (*Exod. 37:10–16*); (4) the lampstand (*Exod. 37:17–24*); (5) the altar of incense (*Exod. 37:25–29*); (6) the altar of burnt offering (*Exod. 38:1–7*); (7) the basin for washing (*Exod. 38:8*); (8) the courtyard (*Exod. 38:9–20*); and (9) the material used for the tabernacle (*Exod. 38:21–31*). Exodus 39 continues with the descriptions of the ephod, breastplate, and other priestly garment pieces.

The tabernacle's services were visual object lessons of the gospel, demonstrating God's entire plan of redemption. The various ceremonies depicted (1) how God abhors and deals with sin, (2) how He saves repentant people, (3) what is the fate of the wicked, and (4) how He will secure a glorious future that will be without evil.

Two different but closely related services were performed in the sanctuary during the year: the daily and the yearly. This two-phase ministry illustrated how God treats sin and saves sinners. Through the *daily* sanctuary services, God assured those who repented that He forgave their sins and graciously offered them salvation. To receive this gift of salvation, a sacrifice had to be made, and these sacrifices pointed to the death of the Messiah, whose blood "cleanses us from all sin" (*1 John 1:7, NKJV*). Confession of sin and accepting the robe of Christ's righteousness was at the center of this gift (*Ps. 32:1, 2*). In this way, the repentant sinner was assured forgiveness and could rejoice in salvation.

The *yearly* service, performed on the Day of the Atonement, demonstrated how God eradicates sin, solves the sin problem, and secures the sinless future (*Leviticus 16, John 1:29*). Presently, Christ's twofold ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is another expression of God's work for us (*Heb. 7:25*) and will bring the final solution to the problem of evil (*Dan. 7:13, 14, 22, 27; Dan. 8:14; Rev. 21:4*).

The sanctuary was a place for worshiping God, praising Him, and giving thanks. Worship is about maintaining one's relationship with God, who invites believers into that fellowship.

God's Presence in the Tabernacle

Read Exodus 40:1–38. How did the Israelites discern God's presence?

The final chapter of Exodus (*Exodus 40*) describes the dedication of the tabernacle and the gift of the Decalogue. The tabernacle's dedication was the culminating event of Israel at Sinai.

God's glory is His holiness, His character, and His loving presence, which is goodness itself (*Exod. 3:5; Exod. 33:18, 19*). His presence filled the tabernacle and was visible as the cloud, the Shekinah glory. The book of Exodus ends with the emphasis on God's guiding presence, in the cloud of the Lord by day, and in the cloud of fire by night. In a very real and powerful way, the Hebrew people were to experience not just the reality of God but also His close and abiding presence as He led them.

Moses set up the tabernacle on the first day of the first month in the second year (*Exod. 40:2, 17*). He also consecrated everything—including Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (*Exod. 40:9, 13–15*)—with anointing oil. He went through the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the courtyard, dedicating it all to the Lord. Through this process, he inaugurated the services for the whole sanctuary (*also see Num. 7:1*). Only during the inauguration of the tabernacle was Moses able to enter the Most Holy Place; thereafter, the high priest alone could minister there each year on the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:2, 17*).

On three occasions, the biblical text states that the work was finished: (1) at the end of Creation week, God underlines the completion of His creative works (*Gen. 2:1–3*); (2) on the completion of the tabernacle, the biblical text declares: "So Moses finished the work" (*Exod. 40:33*); and (3) it also is expressed when Solomon finished the work on the temple (*1 Kings 7:51*).

This connection between the Creation and Israel's sanctuary points to the cosmic dimension, the time when the Lord will dwell with the redeemed on the new earth in the New Jerusalem, which is "the Tabernacle of God" (*Rev. 21:2, 3; compare with Rev. 22:1–4*).

God's filling the tabernacle with His presence (*Exod. 40:34*) was the grand climax to events that began with the birth of Moses and continued with the defeat of the Egyptian gods during the 10 plagues, with the escape from Egypt, with the defeat of the Egyptian army, and, finally, with God's revelation on Mount Sinai.

What are ways that, even now, you can experience the presence of God? Why is it important that you do so?

Jesus Tabernacled With Humanity

Read John 1:14. How is Christ's incarnation compared to the tabernacle?

The incarnation of Jesus is a mystery as well as an exclusive science that the redeemed will study throughout eternity. The apostle John states that Christ, by taking upon Himself our body, revealed that He dwells with us in a tangible way. Jesus here in the flesh resembles the God of the Old Testament, who dwelt with the Israelites in the tabernacle at Sinai and in the wilderness as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

During His incarnation, Jesus tabernacled with humanity. What an unfathomable concession! The eternal God comes down to us, as one of us, in order to assure us that He truly is "Immanuel, God with us."

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said that if two or three are gathered in His name, He will be there among them. Christ is with His people through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ invites His followers to be in close relationship with Him: " 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me' " (*Rev. 3:20, ESV*).

Read Revelation 21:1–3. What is presented to us here?

The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to the earth, and John declares: " 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God' " (*Rev. 21:3, NKJV*). There is no temple in the New Jerusalem (*Rev. 21:22*) because the whole city is the temple, God's sanctuary. The city's length, breadth, and height are equal (*Rev. 21:16*) as it was with the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary, which was in the shape of a cube, with all sides equal. For eternity, in a world without sin, death, or suffering, we will dwell in the immediate presence of our God.

Looking at what we have been promised in Jesus, how can we learn to endure to the end?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 353–358, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The construction of the sanctuary was preceded by a divine act of redemption, namely, the deliverance of Israel from the enslaving power of Egypt. This, in turn, was followed by God’s willingness to enter into a permanent covenant relationship with His people. He would be their God, and they would become His people (Ex. 6:7). The way they would relate to Him and to each other was defined by the covenant law. The tabernacle was indeed a place of meeting, a place where God and humans came together. It was only after redemption and the establishment of permanent union with God through the covenant that the people had access to God in His dwelling place.”—*Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, “Exodus” (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 226.

Meanwhile, Ellen G. White describes the purpose of the sanctuary services: “Thus in the ministration of the tabernacle, and of the temple that afterward took its place, the people were taught each day the great truths relative to Christ’s death and ministration, and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358.

Discussion Question:

- 1 Central to the worship services in the sanctuary was the shedding of blood. All sorts of animals were sacrificed, and their blood was used in almost all the temple rituals. What did the blood symbolize, and what did all these sacrifices ultimately point to?
- 2 However amazing it is that God, the Creator of the universe, would in the sanctuary dwell among His people, how much more astonishing is it that He would come to dwell among us as one of us, a human being? That itself would have been an amazing expression of love. But then to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin—that is, to die in our behalf? What does this teach us about the character of God? Also, what does this teach us about how much God wants to see us saved into His eternal kingdom?
- 3 Read Hebrews 8:1–6. What does it tell us about how the earthly sanctuary reflected what Jesus is doing for us now in the heavenly sanctuary?

Great Reward of the Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Fernando Joaquim Ge joined a big construction company in Mozambique with the understanding that he wouldn't work on Sabbath. But after three years, the company boss asked him to go on a business trip on Saturday. Fernando reminded his boss, Alexander, that he didn't work on Saturdays.

Still, at 5 a.m. Saturday, Alexander pulled up at Fernando's house to drive to Zimbabwe. When Fernando declined to go, Alexander barred him from returning to work until they had a one-on-one meeting.

At the meeting several days later, Alexander suspended Fernando for seven days without pay. He also gave him three options: resign, work on Saturdays, or forfeit two days' pay for every Saturday that he missed work. He told Fernando to submit his decision in writing after seven days.

Fernando turned in a 10-page document with his decision. He wrote that he couldn't resign because he needed the job. He wrote that he couldn't work on Saturdays because he obeyed God, and he included a number of Bible verses about the Sabbath. He concluded that he was willing to take a pay cut for every Saturday that he missed work, and he also was ready to make up Saturday work on Sundays. Taking the document, Alexander told Fernando to keep working while he discussed it with his management team.

A week passed, and Alexander called Fernando on a Sunday to come to his house. The house was in another town, and Fernando arrived by public bus. Alexander instructed Fernando to drive a company car to a town 70 miles away to inspect a company project. Fernando returned late that night, after the public buses had stopped running, and he slept at Alexander's house. The next Sunday, Alexander asked Fernando to come over again. This time, he wanted him to take his mother out in the company car.

The following day, on Monday, Alexander called a company meeting and asked Fernando to stand up. "Fernando took a pay cut because of his faith in God," he said. "But now we see that he is sincere, so he doesn't need to work on Saturdays." Then he presented Fernando with keys to a company car. "Use this car for all company business," he said. "And if you have business for your church, you also can use it freely, and we will pay for the gas. We only have one request. Ask your pastor to pray for our company to prosper."

From that day in 2003 until today, Fernando has never had any Sabbath problems at work. The company car has proven to be a blessing to the church, and Fernando has used it to visit sick and elderly people, to participate in evangelistic programs, and to engage in other church activities. Every time people see the car, they remember that Fernando keeps the Sabbath. "It is worthwhile to be faithful to God," Fernando said. "There is a great reward."

Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed in Mozambique and other countries in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the recipient of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this week.