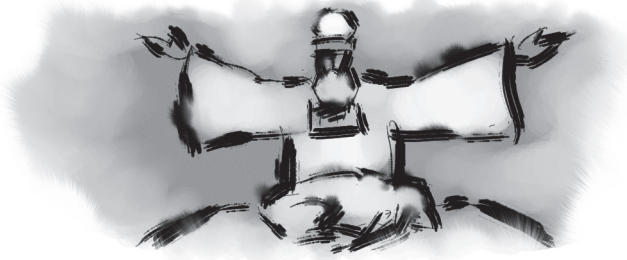


Worship and Dedication



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 25:22; Numbers 7; 8; Zech. 4:1–6, 11–14; Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4.*

Memory Text: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

No question, the children of Israel are separated from our modern world through the vast gaps of time and culture. Their world is, in many ways, as incomprehensible to us as ours would be to them.

Nevertheless, the unifying factor is the Lord, the One who created and redeemed them, as well as us. Whatever the gaps in culture, language, and history, we worship the same God, no matter the differences in our forms and expressions. Indeed, the basic truths taught to them through their rites and rituals are, in principle, the same ones we are to learn today.

This week we'll continue to follow our spiritual ancestors on their journey of faith. We'll examine more of the rituals, laws, and commands that God gave His people at that time. Among other things, we'll look at the dedication of the altar of burnt offering, at the menorah (lampstand) in the earthly sanctuary, as well as the ordination of the Levites to their sacred calling of working with the priests in their ministrations of the sanctuary in the wilderness.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 17.*

Altar Dedication

In the wilderness sanctuary, the sacrifices centered on the altar of burnt offering. Constructed of acacia wood overlaid with bronze, the altar stood within the courtyard near the entrance to the two-apartment sanctuary. The golden altar before the veil of the Most Holy Place served only for the burning of incense.

Read Numbers 7. What thoughts come to your mind as you read about the offerings given during this solemn ritual? What spiritual points from this account can be applied to ourselves today? For instance, where do you see the Cross represented here?

The altar already had been consecrated for seven days (*Exod.* 29:37). Now the princes—as representatives of the full nation—brought offerings to celebrate the dedication of the altar over a period of 12 days. Each prince and his tribe had their special day. All the gifts were identical; perhaps this was a way of showing that no matter who we are or our station in life, we all stand before God in the same position, that of sinners needing grace.

“The Jews saw in the sacrificial offerings the symbol of Christ whose blood was shed for the salvation of the world. All these offerings were to typify Christ and to rivet the great truth in their hearts that the blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanseth from all sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 106, 107.

It’s so easy to get caught up in the things of the world, isn’t it? What can you do each day to help keep the reality of the Cross, and what was done for you there, first and foremost in your mind?

Communion With God

As a symbol, the ark was at the hub of Israelite worship. It symbolized God’s heavenly throne. “The Lord of hosts . . . sits enthroned on the cherubim” (2 *Sam.* 6:2, *RSV*). In the Most Holy Place, the visible Shekinah glory, hovering between the cherubim, represented the Lord’s presence. The Ten Commandments beneath the cherubim throne attested to the Divine will, the foundation of the covenant between God and His people—and the moral basis for His universal rule and government. The law provided the worshipers an insight into the character of God, in addition to stipulating His righteous requirements.

Read Exodus 25:22 and Numbers 7:89. Try to imagine what kind of an experience this would be. How would you like to have that kind of close encounter with God? What makes you think that you wouldn’t be destroyed completely were you to get too close to Him? See *Exod.* 20:19.

In what sense can you today get even closer to the presence of God? See *Heb.* 4:14–16. How has Jesus made this approach possible?

Notice, too, how Moses had gone into the sanctuary to speak to the Lord. Yet, according to the text, the Lord spoke to Moses instead. The point is, most of us know how to pray, most of us know how to speak to the Lord, to plead our case, to ask for this or that.

But communion isn’t just one way. In most relationships, each party will communicate with the other. Should it be any different between us and our Maker? Of course not.

The question for us, then, is, How open are we to hearing the voice of God when He is speaking to us?

What have your experiences in communion with God been like? How has the Lord communicated His will to you? How open are you to hearing His voice? What things in your life might be keeping you from a fuller communion with the Lord?

Light in the Sanctuary

When Moses entered the sanctuary after the 12 days devoted to the dedication of the altar in the court, we may assume that it was dark inside the Holy Place. In that conversation, the Lord directed that Aaron should light the seven lamps of the “candlestick,” known in Hebrew as the menorah, based on the Hebrew word *or*, for light (*Num. 8:1–4*).

The menorah (or candlestick) with its main shaft and six branches (three on either side) was hammered from a single talent of gold. It was in the form of a stylized almond branch (*Exod. 25:31–40*). The oil lamps, resting atop each branch, were attended by the priests twice a day—morning and evening (*Exod. 30:7, 8*). “[Aaron] shall keep the lamps in order upon the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord continually” (*Lev. 24:4, RSV*; emphasis added).

What insights do the following texts give as to the meaning of the menorah?

Zech. 4:1–6, 11–14

Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4

Zechariah’s vision implies that the oil piped to the menorah lamps, enabling them to burn, is God’s Spirit (*vss. 5, 6*). The Hebrew word for the almond (*Jer. 1:11, 12*) means “to watch” or “to wake.” The almond literally was named the “wake tree” or “watch tree” because it was the earliest tree “to waken” and flower. John sees in the heavenly representation of the sanctuary a menorah of seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are identified as “seven Spirits of God”—John’s mode of referring to the Holy Spirit in His multiple operations.

Thus, Israel in the wilderness was assured day and night of God’s presence in the first apartment, as well as in the second.

How has the Lord shown you the reality of His presence in your own life? Go back over those times when clearly you’ve experienced God’s presence in a remarkable manner. How can revisiting these experiences help you to stay firm in times that you feel yourself wallowing in fear and darkness? See *Psalms 23*.

Dedication of the Levites: Part 1

Read Numbers 8:6–26, describing the dedication of the Levites to their special work in the service of God. What points impress you regarding this service? What does this teach us about holiness, about sin, about purification, and about dedication to God? What principles can we take away from this for our lives today, regardless of whatever role we play in the Lord’s service?

The families of the three divisions of the Levites were encamped around the sanctuary. Because they numbered more than 20,000 (*Num.* 3:39), it is obvious that some parts of their dedication were done by symbolic representation. That is, only certain ones, representatives, as opposed to all the Levites, were involved directly and immediately.

What’s fascinating here, too, is the idea that the Levites—after they were cleansed and shaven, and after they offered a sin offering (*Num.* 8:7, 8)—were called an “offering” or a “wave-offering” (*vs.* 11). This certainly wasn’t anything related to human sacrifice. Instead, it gave the idea of dedication, of consecration, and of acknowledgment that these Levites were going to be doing a work in behalf of Israel, doing for them what they couldn’t be doing for themselves.

This is seen even more when Moses said that “the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites” (*vs.* 10), acknowledging that these responsibilities had been passed on to the Levites. The tribe as a whole was offered as a living sacrifice to God, who in turn gave them as a gift this special ministry in the sanctuary in place of the firstborn, whom they now represented.

Keeping the principles in mind seen in this ceremony, how do we understand what Paul says in Romans 12:1? How can we be a “living sacrifice”? What does that mean in our daily lives?

Dedication of the Levites: Part 2

“For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me” (*Num. 8:16*).

Notice how emphatic the Lord was regarding the special calling of the Levites. They were “wholly given” to Him. The Hebrew reads more literally that they are “given given to me,” emphasizing by repetition just how serious their calling was.

Read Numbers 8:19. What is meant by the phrase that the Levites were to “make an atonement for the children of Israel”? How are we to understand this in light of the Cross? *Rom. 5:11, Heb. 9:25–28.*

Scholars are divided on the precise meaning of the phrase here. Obviously, it does not mean “to make atonement” in the sense of dying for the sins of others. The verb translated “make atonement” in this context has a broader meaning than how it’s commonly used. In this case, the answer could be found in the same verse, in which it says that the Levites, by doing their service on behalf of Israel, would spare them from the plague. That is, in their work of ministry, they were helping protect the children of Israel from the Divine wrath that they would face were they to come “nigh unto the sanctuary” (*Num. 8:19*).

Thus the Levites, like the priests themselves, were doing something on behalf of the people that they couldn’t do themselves. In this looser sense, then, they were said to “make an atonement” for the people.

Though certainly nothing we do can make any kind of atonement, how can we, by faithfully doing our duties, work as the Levites did on behalf of the people? What are you doing in your local church for the betterment of the church and its mission?

Further Study: Trace the ancient Jewish custom of “laying on hands.” What seems to be its essential significance? *Gen. 48:8, 9, 13, 14, 17–20; Num. 27:18–23; Matt. 19:13–15; Acts 13:1–3.*

“To the Jew this form was a significant one. When a Jewish father blessed his children, he laid his hands reverently upon their heads. When an animal was devoted to sacrifice, the hand of the one invested with priestly authority was laid upon the head of the victim. And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they, by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed.

“At a later date the rite of ordination by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

① In what way does the local pastor today function in the role of the Levite? What can we do to support the pastor in this role?

② How does the act of giving impact our relationship with God? How is giving from our income an act of worship, of faith? Why is it so important to give generously?

③ What is our understanding of what Jesus did on the cross for us that we could not do for ourselves? Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't just reforming our lives and obeying the law and loving others unconditionally be enough to make us right with God?

Summary: The forms of ancient Israel's worship differ from that of the modern church in the world's wilderness, but its substance is the same. Dedication of our material goods, contemplation of the meaning of the Cross, prayer, reflecting the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and total dedication to the Lord all spell out the same biblical faith.

Mom's Powerful Prayers

by NASTYA BYKOVA

I am the youngest child and the only girl in my family. When I was growing up, I remember that my mother had an overpowering fear that I would die. Her fears were so immobilizing that she couldn't even sleep at night. Although we were not a religious family, my mother's fears drove her to pray and beg God to save my life.

She decided she would do anything to keep me safe, so she started going to different churches and even to magicians, looking for help. Then an Adventist pastor came to hold meetings in our town. Mother went and listened intently. She was amazed at what the preacher said. She asked the pastor to pray for her, and her fears disappeared. She devoted her life to Jesus from that day.

My mother had enjoyed a career as a professional dancer, but she laid it aside when she met Jesus. Her actions shocked my father, but he never complained. My brothers, who also were dancers, found it hard to give up dancing to follow Christ, but Mother never stopped praying for them until they all had given their lives to Christ.

With Mom no longer dancing, we lived on Father's income. Money was tight, and often we could barely pay the bills. One day we had only some stale bread in the house. Mother gathered us around and prayed, asking God to provide. That evening we heard a knock on the door. It was the pastor, holding two large bags of groceries and soap. My father was so surprised when he learned that God had answered our prayer for food.

God has continued to answer our prayers. He made a way for me to study at Zaoksky Adventist University when my parents couldn't possibly afford to send me. After I graduated from high school I received an e-mail from some people I had translated for. They wanted to pay my school fees for one year. After that God provided translating jobs that paid my school fees until I finished my studies.



My mother's fear drove her to God, who took away the fear and replaced it with great faith. Since then her prayers have kept us all close to Him. I believe that God has a special purpose for my life, and I am happy to follow Him and to live my life by prayer.

Thank you for giving your mission offerings. They lead thousands like my mother to Christ every year.

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