

# Rejoicing (Being Joyful) Before the Lord: The Sanctuary<sup>1</sup> and Worship



## SABBATH—JULY 16

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 25:1–22; Exodus 29:38, 39; Exodus 35; Deuteronomy 12:5–7, 12, 18; Deuteronomy 16:13–16.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Be filled with joy there in the sight of the Lord your God. Your children should also be joyful. So should your male and female servants. And so should the Levites from your towns. The Levites won’t [will not] receive any part of the land as their share” (Deuteronomy 12:12, NirV).

**RUSSIAN WRITER LEO TOLSTOY WROTE ABOUT A FRIEND WHO WAS DYING.** The friend explained to Tolstoy his loss of faith. The man said that from his childhood he had prayed. It was his own act of private worship before going to sleep. One day he went on a hunting trip with his brother. That night, as they were getting ready for bed in the same room, he knelt down to pray. His brother looked at him and said, “You still doing that?” From that moment on, the man never prayed again. The man never worshiped again. The man never showed any faith. The words “You still doing that?” showed him just how empty and meaningless this worship had been to him for all of those years. And so he stopped.

This story shows the danger of just practicing something without truly believing in it. Worship needs to come from the heart and from the soul. Worship needs to come from a true relationship with God. That is why we will study this week about the Israelite sanctuary service of early Bible times. It is the center of Israelite worship. We need to learn what we can from it about how we can have a deeper worship experience.

1. sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

**SUNDAY—JULY 17**

**“THAT I MAY DWELL [LIVE] AMONG THEM” (Exodus 25:1–9)**

“ ‘You will bring them in. You will plant them on the mountain you gave them. Lord, you have made that place your home. Lord, your hands have made your holy place secure [safe]’ ” (Exodus 15:17, NIV).

This is the first record in the Bible of a sanctuary. The children of Israel sang this verse as part of the song of freedom after their escape from Egypt. The verse does not talk just about the sanctuary. This verse also suggests that the sanctuary will be God’s home on earth. The Hebrew word translated as “dwelling” comes from a root that means “to sit.” Was the Lord really going to live, “to sit,” among His people here on earth?

**What are the two main points that we learn from Exodus 25:1–9? Why are they very surprising? (As you think about the answer, think about who God is, His power, His rulership.)**

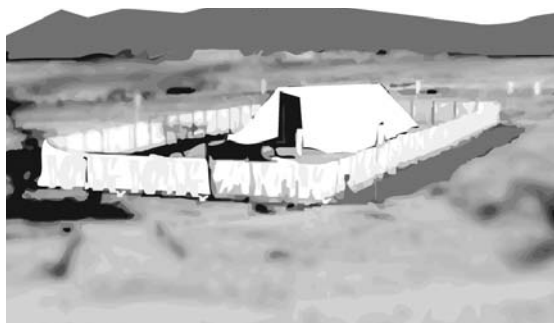
The God who delivered Israel was now going to live among them. Just imagine that! The same God who was able to do so many wonderful “signs and wonders” (Deuteronomy 6:22). The same God who created the heavens and the earth would now live among His people. Talk about the presence of God being near!

On top of that, God was going to live in a building (sanctuary) that

fallen human beings had made. He, who spoke the world into life, could have spoken the word and created a great building. Instead, God allowed His people to be very much involved in the creation of the place for His home. This place would be the center of all Israelite worship.

The Israelites did not make the sanctuary according to human standards. Instead, God had the people “ ‘make [the sanctuary] exactly like the pattern I will show you’ ” (Exodus 25:9, NIV). Every part of the earthly tabernacle (tent; sanctuary) was to show a Holy God properly. Every part had to be worthy of His presence. Every part of it was to inspire a sense of deep respect. After all, this was the living place (home) of the Creator of the universe.

**Imagine standing outside a building and knowing that inside that very same building, Yahweh, the Creator God, the Lord of the heavens and earth, was living inside. What kind of attitude (feeling) would you have, and why? What should your answer tell you about the attitude you should have during worship?**



**The God who made the heavens was going to live in a building that fallen human beings had made.**

**MONDAY—JULY 18**

**WILLING HEARTS (Exodus 35)**

As we learned yesterday, the Lord chose to live among His people. He also did so in a building that they were to make themselves. The building was not something He created Himself. God got His people directly involved in an act of building that was meant to bring them closer to Him. Along with that, He did not create through a miracle the material that would be used for the building.

**What is happening in Exodus 35? What important lessons can we learn from this for ourselves about the whole question of worship?**

Notice the word *willing*.<sup>2</sup> God said, “ ‘Whoever is of a willing heart’ ” (Exodus 35:5, NKJV), and everyone “whose heart was stirred” (verse 21, NKJV) accepted the call to help out. This means that there was no fire and thunder and loud voice from Sinai commanding (ordering) them to give these offerings. Instead, the people chose to give because of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never forces Himself on anyone. The willingness<sup>3</sup> of the people to give showed that they were very thankful to God for what He had done for them. After all, just think of all that the Lord had done for them.

Also notice that the people gave with a spirit of joy and energy. They willingly gave money or gifts. They willingly gave their time, their talents, and the work of their creative abilities. For example: “All

the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom” (verse 26, NKJV), and “every-one whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work” (Exodus 36:2, NKJV).

**By giving as they were, what were the Israelites also doing, even before the sanctuary was made?**

We often like to think of worship as a group of people coming together to sing, pray, and listen to a sermon. This may be true, but worship is more than that. What the children of Israel were doing was worshipping too. Every act of self-denial in giving up their own things, their own time, or their own talents for the Lord’s sake was an act of worship.

**Think about your own acts of giving—tithes, offerings, time, talent. How have you experienced what it means to worship through these acts? By giving of yourself, how are you blessed in return?**



**Whatever we give up or give to God—whether it is our time or talents or our things—is an act of worship.**

2. willing—the desire to help.

3. willingness—eagerness or desire to work or to offer help.

**TUESDAY—JULY 19**

**THE CONTINUAL BURNT OFFERING (Exodus 29:38, 39)**

The daily offering of lambs was a “continual burnt offering” (verse 42). It was to make the people aware of their continuing need of God. It was to teach them about their dependence on Him for forgiveness and acceptance. The fire on the altar was to be kept burning day and night (Leviticus 6:8–13). This fire could serve always as a reminder of their need of a Savior.

God never intended the daily offering of a lamb to be just a routine act. It was to be a time of “intense [serious; focused] interest to the worshipers.” It also was to be a time of preparation for worship, in silent prayer and “with earnest [serious] heart searching and confession of sin.” The faith of the people was to claim the promises of a Savior to come. The Savior was the true Lamb of God who would spill His blood for the sins of the whole world (read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,<sup>4</sup> page 353).

**How do the following verses connect the death of Christ with animal sacrifices in the Old Testament system? Hebrews 10:1–4; 1 Peter 1:18, 19.**

In Hebrews 10:5–10 Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8, which shows that

Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the sacrificial offerings. Paul suggests that God had no pleasure in these sacrifices. But these sacrifices were to be symbols (signs) of sorrow for sin, of repentance,<sup>5</sup> and of turning away from sin. In the same way, God’s giving of His Son as the full Sacrifice would be a time of terrible suffering and sorrow for both the Father and the Son. Paul also points out that true worship must always flow from a forgiven and cleansed heart, one that is willing to obey the One who has made it all possible. “So I am asking you to offer up your bodies to him while you are still alive. Your bodies are a holy sacrifice that is pleasing to God. When you offer your bodies to God, you are worshiping him” (Romans 12:1, NIV).

Worship means giving ourselves wholly and completely to God as a living sacrifice. When we give ourselves first, then our gifts, our praise, and our hearts will follow. This attitude is a sure protection against meaningless and empty rituals (services).

**Ask yourself the following questions, have I given everything up to Christ who died for my sins? Or is there some corner of my heart or life that I refuse to let go of? If so, what is it? And what can I do to let go of it?**

4. Patriarchs and Prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, men such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women who are spokespersons for God.

5. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**WEDNESDAY—JULY 20**

**COMMUNION WITH GOD  
(Exodus 25:10–22)**

One of the important parts of being a Christian and of having a saving relationship with Christ is that of knowing the Lord. Jesus Himself said, “ ‘What is eternal life? It is knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ ” (John 17:3, NIV). As in any kind of relationship, communication is very important.

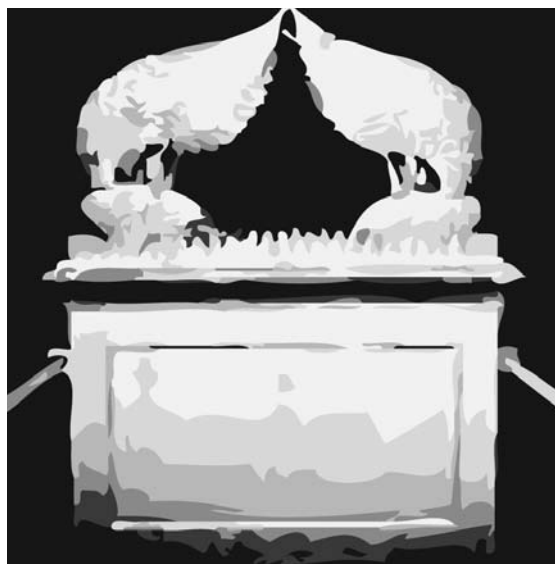
**According to Exodus 25:10–22, what are the people being told to make? What promises are they given?**

The ark contained God’s holy law. But on the top of the ark was the mercy seat,<sup>6</sup> where God was with all His glory (power and beauty). There “God’s truth and faithful love join together. His peace and holiness kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10, NIV). There, from the altar of incense<sup>7</sup> in the Holy Place, the smoke rose upward. This was a symbol of the joining of the prayers of God’s people with the work of Christ as High Priest in heaven.

Among all this is the promise, “ ‘I will meet with you above the cover between the two cherubim [angels] that are over the ark. There I will give you all of my commands for the peo-

ple of Israel’ ” (Exodus 25:22, NIV).

God promised the people not just His presence. He promised to communicate with His people. He promised to talk to them and to guide them in the ways in which they should go.



**Atop the mercy seat, God’s truth and faithful love join together.**

**What do Psalm 37:23; Psalm 48:14; Proverbs 3:6; and John 16:13 promise us?**

Today we do not have an earthly sanctuary. But we do have the promises of God’s guidance and presence in our lives if we surrender to Him. What believer has not failed to notice the leading of the Lord at some point in his or her life?

This is where worship comes in. We must worship the Lord in an attitude of humble surrender and let Him

6. mercy seat—the cover of the ark of the covenant (agreement) in which the law of God was kept; on the ark was a lid made of solid gold with two angels looking down toward the ark. This lid was called the mercy seat.

7. incense—sweet-smelling perfume given off by certain spices when burned. The smoke and the sweet smell of the incense represent the prayers of God’s people rising to Him in heaven.

## Lesson 4 REJOICING (BEING JOYFUL) BEFORE THE LORD: THE SANCTUARY AND WORSHIP

lead us. A heart surrendered to the Lord is a heart that will be guided in the way that the Lord would desire. In the end, true worship should help you to be more open to God's leading because it should help you to learn an attitude of faith and surrender. There is nothing empty in this kind of worship.



The smoke rising from the altar of incense was a symbol of the prayers of God's people.

**THURSDAY—JULY 21**

### REJOICING BEFORE THE LORD (Leviticus 23:39–44)

A good part of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers centers around the sanctuary service. Its building, its services, and the sacrifices and offerings are described there. So is the work of the priests. The sanctuary was a very sacred and holy place. After all, it was the place where God Himself lived. It was the place where Israel came to be forgiven and cleansed of sin. It was the place where Israel learned and experienced the gospel.

At the same time, we must not think that Israelite worship was cold and strict. True, the Lord had set very strict guidelines regarding what was to be done. But these guidelines were not ends (goals) in themselves. Instead, they helped people to reach a goal. And the end (goal) was that God's people would be a holy, joyful, and faithful group of people who would teach the world about the true God (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 4:5–7; Zechariah 8:23).

**What do Leviticus 23:39–44; Deuteronomy 12:5–7, 12, 18; and Deuteronomy 16:13–16 tell us about Israelite worship at the sanctuary?**

One of the great struggles facing the church in our time today is connected with worship and worship styles. In one way, church services can be cold, strict, and without joy. The other danger is that emotions can become too powerful.

An important point to remember is that there is a lesson that we can learn from the sanctuary model. All true worship should lead to rejoicing. It must follow the Bible model. God gave the Israelites very clear and strict instructions about the building of the sanctuary and its ministry (special work) and services. All of these things were meant to teach the people the truths about God's work to save His people. But at the same time, the people were to rejoice before the Lord in their worship. This theme of joy appears over and over again. It should be clear that one can be very strong in Bible teaching and at the same time have

a joyous worship experience. After all, the truths of salvation and judgment should give us great joy.

**What is your own experience in rejoicing (being joyful) before the Lord? What does this mean to you? How can you have a more joyful worship experience?**

**FRIDAY—JULY 22**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pages 343–358; “The Sin of Nadab and Abihu,” pages 359–362; “The Law and the Covenants,” pages 367–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Lord’s Vineyard,” pages 288–290, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Ellen G. White Comments,” in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, pages 1139, 1140.

From the Holy Shekinah (great glory of God), “God made known His will. God’s messages were sometimes communicated to the high priest by a voice from the cloud. Sometimes a light fell upon the angel at the right, to show God’s acceptance. Or sometimes a shadow or cloud rested upon the one at the left to show God’s refusal.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 349.

“In them [His people] the Lord planned to live in His [fullness] in this world by both living in a tent and by so completely taking over the people’s lives. This is to show them, and through them the world, how Jesus would be the ‘living house’ of God.”—Adapted from

F. C. Gilbert, *Practical Lessons From the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today* (Concord, Massachusetts: Good Tidings Press, 1902), page 351.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1 How can you help others to understand that the giving of tithes and offerings is truly an act of worship? What are we giving up when we do not tithe and do not give offerings?
- 2 Think about your own church services. Are they cold and joyless? Or do they depend more on feeling and excitement? Or is there a good balance between both ends? Discuss.
- 3 Some church groups try to reach out to the nonchurched by greatly changing their worship services. This could be a very good thing, but what dangers should they keep in mind? For example, what danger is there in not following important Bible truths?
- 4 In some worship services, programs have been done a certain way for many years. That is the reason given for not wanting to make any changes. How would you answer somebody who did not want to change things for this reason?
- 5 The earthly sanctuary was a very sacred and holy place. This was the place where God Himself remained. But at the same time, the children of Israel were to rejoice before the Lord there. What lessons can we learn from these important truths about worship?