

“Heaven” *on* Earth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:31–2:3; Exod. 39:32, 43; 25:9; Heb. 8:5; John 2:19–21; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; Rev. 21:1–22.*

Memory Text: “Who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’ ” (*Hebrews 8:5, NKJV*).

Though the sanctuary in heaven is the original, the one where God Himself is ministering “for us,” the Lord has revealed truths about this sanctuary in different ways to us here on earth.

God created the Garden of Eden as a symbol of the sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary and its function in salvation were represented in the earthly tabernacle and the larger structure of the Israelite temples.

In Jesus, of course, the temple was made manifest in a human being. And, finally, the heavenly temple will come down to the new earth.

As we will see, God has used concepts relating to the heavenly sanctuary to reveal truth. This week we will study some of those concepts.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 12.*

The First “Sanctuary” on Earth

Bible students have noted that many features of the Garden of Eden correspond to the later sanctuaries in Israel, indicating that Eden was the first symbolic “temple” on earth. Some parallels between Eden and the sanctuary include:

1. At the end of the Creation account and the report describing the construction of the wilderness tabernacle, the same three elements—approval, completion, and blessing—are expressed with the same key words (*compare “all,” “finish,” and “bless” in Gen. 1:31–2:3 with Exod. 39:32, 43; 40:33*).
2. Just as God was “walking in the Garden” (*Gen. 3:8, NASB*), so He was in the midst of His people in the sanctuary (*2 Sam. 7:6, 7*).
3. Adam was to “tend” and “keep” the Garden (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*). The same two verbs are used for the service of the Levites in the tabernacle (*Num. 3:7, 8*).
4. Gardenlike imagery appears all throughout the sanctuary (*Exod. 25:31–36, 1 Kings 6:18*).
5. Cherubim guarded the Garden (*Gen. 3:24*); two cherubim were stationed in the Most Holy Place (*Exod. 25:18–22*).
6. Just as Creation took six days, each day being introduced by “God said” and all of them together followed by the Sabbath, so there are six “the LORD spoke to Moses” sections concerning the tabernacle (*Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1*), followed by a seventh section about the Sabbath (*Exod. 31:12–17*).
7. The sanctuary was finished on the first day of the first month (*Exod. 40:17*), the Hebrew New Year’s Day, which recalls the completion of the world at Creation.

Genesis 2 did not need to be explicit about these parallels; the ancients understood them. For example, a Jewish writing of the second century B.C. claims that “the garden of Eden was the holy of holies and the dwelling of the Lord.”

The Garden of Eden is called the “garden of God” (*Isa. 51:3, Ezek. 28:13, 31:9*). It was God’s dwelling on earth, the place where our first parents were intended to worship and commune with Him. Therefore, the greatest loss of the Fall was not the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden but the loss of being in the immediate presence of God.

Dwell on the concept of the word *sanctuary* itself. What comes to your mind? What things form a “sanctuary” for you now? How does your understanding of these sanctuaries on earth help you to understand better what God’s sanctuary in heaven provides for us?

Copy of the Pattern

Read Exodus 25:9, 40; Hebrews 8:5; 9:23, 24. What is the relationship between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries?

The Scriptures clearly teach that Moses did not invent the tabernacle but built it according to the divine instruction that he received on the mountain (*Exod. 26:30, 27:8, Num. 8:4*). The earthly sanctuary was to be constructed after the “pattern” (*Exod. 25:9, 40*). The Hebrew word for “pattern” (*tabnit*) expresses the idea of a model or copy; thus, we can conclude that Moses saw some kind of miniature model that represented the heavenly sanctuary and that this model served as the pattern for the earthly one.

Therefore, the heavenly temple is the original, the model for the Israelite sanctuaries. What is also obvious is that we cannot equate the sanctuary in heaven with heaven itself. The heavenly temple is “in heaven” (*Rev. 11:19, 14:17, 15:5*); thus, heaven contains it. The two are not synonymous.

The book of Hebrews explains in unmistakable terms that the heavenly sanctuary is real. The sanctuary in heaven is called the “true tabernacle” (*Heb. 8:2, NKJV*), as well as the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” (*Heb. 9:11, NKJV*), while the earthly is a “copy and shadow” of the heavenly one (*Heb. 8:5, NKJV*). As a shadow is always a mere representation of something real, and an imperfect and faint representation at that, the earthly sanctuary is a mere representation of the heavenly. Whatever its limitations, however, the earthly sanctuary does reflect the reality of the heavenly one in important ways.

The relationship between the two is called typology. Typology is a divinely designed, prophetic prefiguration that involves two corresponding historical realities, called type (original) and antitype (copy). Because the correspondence runs from the type (original) to the antitype (copy), we can see in Hebrews that the heavenly model that Moses had seen is referred to as “type” or “pattern” (*Heb. 8:5*) and the earthly sanctuary as “antitype” or “copy” (*Heb. 9:24*). This truth presents more evidence that the heavenly one existed prior to the earthly one. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are on solid biblical ground when we emphasize the physical reality of the heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus as the Sanctuary

Read John 2:19–21. Why is Jesus’ body compared to the temple? See also John 1:14.

One of the themes in the Gospel of John is that, with Jesus, the better “temple” has come. Tabernacle imagery is used as early as in John 1:14. Jesus is the Word who “dwelt” among men, and they saw His “glory.” The Greek word used for “to dwell” (*skenoo*) is the verbal form of the Greek noun for “tabernacle” (*skene*); so, one could translate verse 14 as the Word “tabernacled among us.” In this context, the word *glory* recalls the glory of God that filled both the wilderness tabernacle (*Exod. 40:34, 35*) and Solomon’s temple at its inauguration (*2 Chron. 7:1–3*). So, when Christ came to earth as a human, He fulfilled God’s temple promise to dwell among His people.

As the texts above show, Jesus declared Himself to be the temple, signifying already the end of the earthly temple’s significance after His death (*John 2:19–21, Matt. 27:51*). Also, when Jesus said that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*) and the Light of the world (*John 8:12*), He might have been pointing beyond the manna on the table to the bread of the presence and the lampstand, objects in the earthly sanctuary. A definite reference to the sanctuary is the designation of Jesus as the sacrificial “Lamb of God” who will bear the sin of the world (*John 1:29*).

“All who did service in connection with the sanctuary were being educated constantly in regard to the intervention of Christ in behalf of the human race. This service was designed to create in every heart a love for the law of God, which is the law of His kingdom. The sacrificial offering was to be an object lesson of the love of God revealed in Christ—in the suffering, dying victim, who took upon Himself the sin of which man was guilty, the innocent being made sin for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 233.

Because of our sinful natures, it’s so easy to think that God is angry with us. How does the revelation of God’s love, as seen in the life and death of Jesus, help each of us to realize on a personal level that God loves us despite our faults? In what ways should this realization encourage us to gain victories over self?

The Church as the Sanctuary

After Christ's ascension to heaven and His inauguration as High Priest in the sanctuary there, the temple on earth no longer had any real purpose in the plan of salvation (*see Matt. 27:50, 51*). However, God still seeks to dwell among His people on earth, which was now possible through the Holy Spirit. The apostles use temple imagery to convey this truth.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; and Ephesians 2:19–22. Notice the sanctuary imagery in these texts. What truth does the Bible teach us here?

Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 to the church as a corporate unity, and he presents to them the temple themes of ownership (*1 Cor. 3:16*) and of holiness (*1 Cor. 3:17*). He applies the same principles in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 to the individual believer. As a temple, the believer is holy terrain and, as such, is under divine obligation to live in holiness. Paul uses the temple imagery to emphasize his call for pure and holy living, which in this context he identifies as sexual purity over immorality (*1 Cor. 6:15–18*). Paul's last reference to the church as a divine sanctuary fits into this pattern. There is no common ground between believers and unbelievers (*2 Cor. 6:14–7:1*), for the church is in a covenant relationship with God and, thus, is exclusively His (*2 Cor. 6:18*).

At the same time, the church is not only God's temple but also a holy priesthood (*1 Pet. 2:5, 9*). No doubt, with such a privilege as this, important responsibilities follow. How crucial that we surrender our lives in faith and obedience to the Lord who has given us so much and who, therefore, asks much of us in return.

Of course, we are saved by Christ's righteousness, which covers us completely. However, because of what we have been given in Christ by grace, what does God ask of us in return? And even more important, how can we best do that which He asks of us?

New Creation

Read Revelation 7:15–17. Where are the redeemed, and how does this passage portray them?

These verses describe the redeemed as kings and priests who serve in God’s palace and temple (*Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6*). The promise that “He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them” (*Rev. 7:15, NASB*) alludes to God’s presence in the wilderness sanctuary, where He dwelt among ancient Israel as its Leader. On the new earth, the sanctuary once more becomes the perfect place of relationship where God and the redeemed meet. It guarantees shelter, protection, and the ultimate fulfillment of life in the presence of God and His Christ. The One who once tabernacled among men (*John 1:14*) now spreads the tabernacle over His saints so that they may “tabernacle” in His place.

Read Revelation 21:1–22. How is the New Jerusalem described? What parallels do you find between the Holy City and the sanctuary in these texts?

John does not see a temple in the New Jerusalem (*Rev. 21:22*), but this does not mean that there is no temple. Rather, the New Jerusalem itself is the temple and the “tabernacle of God” (*Rev. 21:3, NKJV*). Several sanctuary elements are assigned to the New Jerusalem: it is “holy” and of heavenly origin (*Rev. 21:2, 10*); it has the same cubical form as did the Most Holy Place (*Rev. 21:16, 1 Kings 6:20*); similar to the temple precincts, “nothing unclean” is allowed into the city (*Rev. 21:27*); and, most important of all, God is present. In the sanctuary of God, we can live with Him in the closest relationship possible (*Rev. 21:3, 7*). This is the goal of salvation.

An eternity in a close relationship with God? Why is it, then, so crucial for us to walk, as Ellen G. White says over and over, “in close communion with God” now?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 673–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet, ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’ 1 Corinthians 2:9. Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do you think it is important for us to understand that God’s heavenly sanctuary is a real place? At the same time, why must we be careful not to make too detailed a comparison between the earthly temple and the heavenly temple?
- 2 In class, dwell more on the idea of the church as a “sanctuary.” How do you understand this truth? Also, how can we as a church better fulfill this crucial teaching?
- 3 “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). What do these texts teach us, and how can we apply their teachings to the way that we live?
- 4 Dwell more on this idea that we are “priests” now and that we will function as priests after the Second Coming. What are those functions for us now, and what will they be after Jesus returns? Why does even the use of the word *priests* show us just how central the concept of the sanctuary is to the plan of salvation?

Faithful Little Flock

In China, pastors often have several churches. Pastor Sun oversees 10 churches and 200 small groups with a membership of about 5,000. To shepherd this large and diverse flock, Pastor Sun trains lay evangelists.

Sister Xu found Christ and joined the Seventh-day Adventist church in the provincial capital. She wanted to share her new faith with her family and friends living in her hometown, Wu Yan, a city of about 100,000 people. When she arrived in Wu Yan, she found no other Seventh-day Adventists living there. Undaunted, she shared her faith first with her sister and then with others. Xu found several people who wanted to hear about Christ, and she asked Pastor Sun to send someone to help her plant a church in Wu Yan.

Pastor Sun sent Liu, a Global Mission pioneer, to work with Xu. He met with Xu's sister and some neighbors in Xu's home. Another neighbor reported Liu's activities to her own church officials, who made trouble for Liu.

The little band of new believers prayed that God would protect the infant flock, and Liu visited the neighbor's church. He worshiped with them and made friends in the congregation. Liu met several people who were open to hearing what he believed, and he explained his work.

One woman in the church, Zhang, asked for Bible studies. Liu studied with her, and she in turn brought five others to meet Liu and study the Bible with him. All six people from the neighbor's church began keeping the Sabbath. Liu encouraged them to continue attending their church on Sunday to find other honest-hearted Christians who wanted to know what the Bible teaches.

When the Sunday church's leaders learned that more than 20 of their members were studying to become Seventh-day Adventists, they were angry and told them to stop attending their church. But the little group continued telling others what they had discovered. The believers invited their friends and those in need to come for prayer and help.

In one year, more than 30 people are meeting regularly on the Sabbath, and 18 have been baptized. In China, a new believer must know the Bible truths and pass an examination before they are baptized, so 18 baptisms is remarkable.

Our mission offerings support the world church in its challenging task of telling everyone everywhere that Jesus loves them and died to save them. Thank you for your part in supporting missions around the world.



PASTOR SUN works in China. This photo has been altered to protect his identity.