

LESSON 2: THE HISTORY OF THE SANCTUARY

Review:

Lesson One - The purpose of the sanctuary is to remove the barriers of sin and guilt that keep us from face-to-face communion with God.

IN this lesson we will be tracing the history of the sanctuary over the years, and looking at the work of God that was going forward through all the changes and developments. This study provides an impressive example of a Biblical principle known as “progressive revelation.”

1. Which part of the sanctuary came first?

Genesis 4:3-5 - *And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.*

This is the first specific mention of sacrifices to the Lord, which means that some elements at least of the ceremonial ritual came long before the physical structure of the sanctuary.

Notice that the first story of sacrifice to the Lord also includes a false sacrifice. Cain's fruit was probably very nice produce, but it wasn't a lamb, and couldn't represent faith in the coming Messiah. Instead, it represented what Cain could do by himself.

In Genesis chapter 8, Noah built an altar and offered sacrifice to God after the flood, and in chapter 12 we read of Abram doing the same. There's no mention of the religious practices of the nine generations between these two, but it seems reasonable to assume that altars and sacrifices were a part of their worship of the true God.

2. What was the point of these sacrifices? Were they some sort of bribe, or payment of a debt?

Genesis 9:9 - *And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you.*

Genesis 17:7 - *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.*

In the stories of Noah and Abram, God introduces the new idea of a covenant. Though never mentioned before, the covenant is confirmed to Noah eight times. A long silence on the subject takes us to Abram, to whom the covenant is confirmed in no less than eleven different verses. More important than the number of references, though, is the greatly expanded idea of the covenant as compared to what was said to Noah. But these are not two different covenants; this is just the normal path of progressive revelation.

3. OK, what came next?

Exodus 12:11 - *And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.*

The next element of the sanctuary to be introduced was the ceremonial system, or at least the first of those ceremonies, the Passover.

4. So far we've got sacrifices and ceremonies; what next?

Exodus 19:5-6 - *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

The sanctuary services are only for those who have entered into God's covenant, and central to the whole process is the work of a priest. Symbolic of Christ, of course, the priest we normally think of was the mediator between God and Israel. But here we have the whole nation of Israel acting as the mediator between God and the rest of the nations. Sadly, this is a role the Jewish people largely neglected. In a later lesson we will see that this idea is picked up and expanded in the New Testament.

5. What about the building? When do we get to the building?

Exodus 25:8 - And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Finally! God commissioned the Mosaic sanctuary about three months after the Exodus, approximately 1445 B.C. This is when all the details were laid out for Moses, when the heavenly sanctuary was shown to him, and God commanded "you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern." (Exodus 26:30)

This was no small task. Still, just twenty-one months later, "in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month," the tabernacle was set up for the first time. (Exodus 40:17)

6. What happened to the sanctuary after the children of Israel entered Canaan?

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, they set up camp about three miles to the west, in Gilgal. (Joshua 4:19) This was the time when the land of Canaan was being divided among the tribes of Israel, and the initial battles of conquest were being fought. The ark is mentioned separately in Joshua 6, in the story of Jericho (about four miles northwest of Gilgal), and evidently the sanctuary was erected there, for it is recorded shortly after that "the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover." (Joshua 5:10)

When the most threatening of the Canaanites were defeated, Shiloh (eighteen miles northwest of Gilgal) was designated as "the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place." (Deuteronomy 12:5)

Joshua 18:1 - Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there.

This was approximately 1400 B.C. The sanctuary would remain intact in this location for about 300 years.

7. "Intact"? How could it not be intact?

1 Samuel 4:1-3 - Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines... and when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

This was during the disastrous high priesthood of Eli, and after God's judgment on his household had been announced by the child-prophet, Samuel. The blindness of disobedience led many even of the "elders of Israel" to regard the sacred ark as some kind of magical charm that would ensure victory in battle. They were wrong.

1 Samuel 4:11 - The ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

It would be seven months before the ark came back to Israel, and many years before it was restored to a sanctuary setting.

The ark did not go back to Shiloh. It's possible that Shiloh had been overrun by the attacking Philistines (there's apparently some archaeological evidence for that), but "the tabernacle of the LORD and the altar of the burnt offering" are next mentioned located in the priestly town of Nob, just two miles northeast of Jerusalem. (1 Samuel 21:1) What became of the laver, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense is not clear.

After a brief period at Beth Shemesh, the ark was taken to Kirjath Jearim where it remained for the next twenty years. Then David decided to take it to Jerusalem. Careless as to the specific directions given to Moses in regard to the proper means for moving the ark, they began the journey using a "new cart" as had the Philistines. (2 Samuel 6:3; 1 Chronicles 13:7)

2 Samuel 6:6-7 - Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.

Following Uzzah's death, David's plan was tabled, and the ark was taken to the home of Obed-edom. His household was so abundantly blessed in the next three months that David decided to try again—this time following the proper procedures.

There were no further mishaps, and the ark was placed in a tent prepared for it in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 1:4) But this was only a tent, not the sanctuary, which by this time (approximately 1000 B.C.) had been re-located once again to the town of Gibeon, six miles northwest of Jerusalem. (1 Chronicles 16:39)

8. What did the Jews do without the sanctuary? Did it ever get back together again?

1 Kings 3:2 - *Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days.*

This is not what God had planned. Perhaps the most that can be said for it is that it was the best they could do under the circumstances.

Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains."—2 Samuel 7:1

David's idea was to build a temple for the Lord. God, however, had slightly different plans. Apparently He had seen enough of warfare and bloodshed, and didn't want to be associated with that. He sent His prophet to tell David

1 Chronicles 22:8 - *You shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest.... He shall build a house for My name.*

But David didn't just drop out of the picture entirely. As God directed Moses at the construction of the original sanctuary, so He worked with David now.

1 Chronicles 28:11–12, 19 - Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things.... "All this," said David, "the LORD made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans."

It is interesting to note that even though the Mosaic sanctuary and Solomon's temple were both designed by God, still there were differences. The most obvious of these were the size and permanence of the temple as compared to the Mosaic sanctuary. But other differences are many: Instead of a single lampstand in the holy place, Solomon's temple had ten; in addition to the cherubim on the mercy seat, Solomon's temple had two 18-foot tall cherubim in the most holy place.

9. But if the temple was different, can we be sure it was correct?

2 Chronicles 7:1 - *When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*

10. How long did Solomon's temple last?

Construction of the temple was completed in the eleventh year of Solomon's reign, 958 B.C. (1 Kings 6:38) Though often neglected during the reigns of ungodly kings (Ahaz, for example, in 2 Chronicles 28, and Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33), the temple remained until finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:3–4) All told, it lasted 372 years.

11. So what did the Jews do this time without the sanctuary?

Deuteronomy 28:64 - *Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone.*

Centuries before, God had said what would happen if His people proved unfaithful. Not surprisingly, He was right. The Babylonians took many of the Jews captive, and forcibly resettled others in different locations around the empire. There were, of course, some who did not serve gods of wood and stone. Daniel, Ezekiel, and, in later years, Mordecai, for example.

12. When the temple was destroyed, what happened to the ark?

The Bible gives no answer to this. Jewish historical sources say that the prophet Jeremiah managed to hide the ark in a cave just before the destruction of the city. Where's the cave? Who knows? But it is interesting to note that there is still interest in the subject today.

13. So there had to be another temple? When? Where? How?

Before we look at what was, let's take a look at what might have been. Ezekiel chapters 40–48 present a single vision in which the prophet is given a detailed view of a new temple, a new division of the land of Canaan, and a near-heavenly reign of peace and righteousness. Though key features resemble earlier designs, there are also major differences. Ezekiel's temple, for instance has a square courtyard, rather than rectangular, but the holy and most holy places are nearly the same dimensions as they had been in Solomon's temple.

Ezekiel was writing during the time of the Babylonian exile. The sanctuary, indeed, the whole city of Jerusalem, was in ruins. Were the plans given Ezekiel intended for actual construction? Perhaps, but when later leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah began the restoration of the city and the temple, there is no evidence they made any effort to follow them.

14. Then what was the point of Ezekiel's vision?

Ezekiel 40:4 - And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see."

Ezekiel 48:35 - The name of the city from that day shall be: "THE LORD IS THERE."

There are two points that are obvious: God wanted this vision recorded and reported, so there must be some importance to it; and, the final goal remained the same as always—God dwelling among his people.

People have long debated the significance of Ezekiel's vision. He himself was likely the first to do so. Notice:

1 Peter 1:10–11 - Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

If something as central to God's plans as the sufferings of Christ was not entirely clear to the prophets, it wouldn't be too surprising if there were other issues that weren't immediately understood. This is just one of them. Progressive revelation is still going on, so don't give up.

15. Ezekiel's temple was never built, but there was another temple, right?

After the exile, when the Jews were allowed to return to their land, one of the first things they set out to do was rebuild the sanctuary—with somewhat mixed results.

Ezra 3:10, 12 - When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD,... many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy.

It was a bit of a rocky start, with half the participants at the groundbreaking ceremony weeping instead of cheering. The problem was a lack of size and elegance. With a budget more limited than Solomon had at his disposal, the builders set out to construct a far more modest sanctuary. But one prophecy which stretched their imaginations was

Haggai 2:9 - "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts.

This was hard to believe for many reasons, but chief among them was the absence of the ark. Hidden in a cave somewhere unknown, it was beyond their reach. Thus the Roman historians Tacitus and Cicero both noted that the most holy place stood empty. Only by the personal presence of Christ more than half a millennium later, would this temple be more glorious than Solomon's.

16. What about “Herod’s temple”?

John 2:19–21 - *Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*

Herod, never popular with the Jews, needed something to boost his approval rating. Recognizing that the sanctuary was more than 500 years old and in need of significant maintenance, he settled on a reworking of the temple complex as a way to make the Jews happy glorifying himself. The Jews, however, were wary that he would tear down the old structure and simply never rebuild. So Herod devised a method of construction that was more like an endless remodeling. This is why the Jews said the temple had taken forty-six years to build.

17. And what became of Herod’s temple?

Matthew 24:1–2 - *Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

This was unthinkable. In fact, the only imaginable scenario which might destroy the temple was the end of the world as a whole. This is why the disciples asked

Matthew 24:3 - *When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*

Thirty-nine years later, in the summer of A.D. 70, the Roman army crushed the heart of the Jewish revolt, destroying Jerusalem, and burning the temple. In an effort to reclaim the molten gold of the temple, even the pavement stones were pried from their places. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, more than a million Jews lost their lives, and nearly 100,000 were taken captive.

18. Another sanctuary?

Hebrews 8:1–2 - *Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*

Yes, there is another sanctuary which took the place of Herod’s temple. But that didn’t happen when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Herod’s temple had lost its importance long before. Just days before the crucifixion, as Jesus left the temple for the last time, after pronouncing the woes on the scribes and Pharisees, He said

Matthew 23:37–38 - *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.*

The “fullness of the Godhead” had been driven from His own temple by unbelief, pride, selfishness. The sanctuary, established so God could dwell among His people, had come so thoroughly under the control of evil that Jesus was unwelcome there. It was no longer “My Father’s house,” but now only “your house.”

It was not long, however, before Jesus was to enter “into heaven itself... to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Hebrews 9:24) The work of the sanctuary would continue!

19. Why didn’t God start with the heavenly sanctuary? And why stretch it out over such a long time?

Proverbs 4:18 - *The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.*

This is one of those questions that the Bible doesn’t answer directly. But verses like the one above speak to what we call “progressive revelation.” For reasons of His own, God doesn’t often publish His whole plan in advance. He lets things develop over time, and gives out information on what the military would call a “need-to-know” basis.

2 Peter 1:19 - *We have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

What makes this especially interesting is the focus on prophecy. This is one of the most amazing evidences of God’s wisdom, but we seldom think of it. Much of the sanctuary service, the symbolism of the sacrifices, the timing of the feasts, etc., is really prophetic. And even though it wasn’t clear to human beings from the very beginning what God was going to do, we can look back at it now and see that He knew. That’s one reason we study the sanctuary.

Lesson Summary:

- The sanctuary service didn't happen all at once but was given in parts; first the sacrifices, next the ceremonies, third the covenant and finally the sanctuary building.
- Over the years the sanctuary existed in different forms; first the wilderness tent, next Solomon's, third Zarrubabel's, and then Herod's.
- Ezekiel was given a vision for a temple but it was never built.
- Herod's temple was succeeded by the temple in Heaven where Christ ministers as our High Priest even today.

My Response:

I appreciate that Christ, my High Priest, ministers for my salvation in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

Next Lesson: The Meaning of the Courtyard