

UNDER - STANDING --- THE SANCTUARY

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Chapter 1

SOLVING GOD'S PROBLEM

*“And let them make Me a sanctuary,
that I may dwell among them.”*

—Exodus 25:8

For more than fifty years, I have had the privilege of speaking in many countries around the world, pointing people to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. I have seen the Spirit of God work amazing transformations in people's lives. Recently, I have been studying what the Bible says about the sanctuary—again. Sometimes we get the idea that the doctrine of the sanctuary is hard to understand and that it is filled with a lot of information and details that are difficult to put together and remember. But the purpose of the sanctuary is really quite simple: the purpose of the sanctuary is to reveal the grace and goodness of Jesus Christ. And as I have been restudying what the Bible says about the sanctuary, something unique has been taking place in my own life. I have seen a depth of understanding and a breadth of meaning in the sanctuary that has been transformational for me. It has helped me to see Jesus in new and exciting ways. It has helped me to draw closer to Him than ever before because I have seen Him more clearly in the work and services of the sanctuary.

So here is the purpose of this book. I want to share with you

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what I have found as I have focused again on the important topic of the sanctuary. I want you to see Jesus as I have come to see Him through the sanctuary. Our goal will not be simply to fill our heads with information, although we will discover insights that we may have never noticed before. Our goal will be to learn God's purpose in the sanctuary—His purpose for His people when He had them build a sanctuary on Earth, and His purpose for us today involving the sanctuary in heaven.

Come with me on a journey—a journey to understand more fully what God has in mind for you in His sanctuary message.

The sanctuary gives us a picture of God

Exodus 25:8 tells us that God said to Moses, “Let them [the Israelites] make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” He gave detailed instruction for all the different aspects of this amazing structure. He specified how long and wide the curtains should be for the courtyard surrounding the sanctuary. He gave plans for building an altar—of acacia wood overlaid with bronze—on which sacrifices were to be offered. He designed the laver filled with water, where the priests were to wash before entering the sanctuary.

He laid out the measurements of the tabernacle itself, specifying the colors and patterns of the embroidered fabrics that would form its entrance. He gave directions for making a seven-branched candlestick of gold. He designed the table of shewbread and the golden altar of incense.

God gave instructions for the veil that would separate the two rooms of the sanctuary—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. He revealed all the specifications for the ark of the covenant that represented His throne in heaven. You can find these detailed instructions, and many others, in the book of Exodus. Why was God so careful and exact in spelling out just how the

sanctuary should be built? After all, no building on Earth can contain Him.


I believe God gave these precise instructions for one basic reason—the sanctuary was designed to be a self-portrait of God Himself. He was not just planning a nice place to worship. He was giving us a picture of what He is like. When we look at the sanctuary and its services, when we begin to discern its symbolism, we begin to understand God in a deeper way. We see His love and mercy and justice. The sanctuary shows God to us. It is a revelation of His character. As we study the sanctuary more closely, we will see what God is like more clearly.

God's problem

Have you ever thought that God might have a problem? We face all kinds of problems as we go through life. But God does not have any problems, does He? Surely not! But, yes, God has a

problem. God's problem is not like the ones we deal with. God's problem isn't crime, broken homes, disease, world hunger, or even war. All these things are terrible problems, and God's heart bleeds over them. But they are all actually just symptoms of God's real problem—His greatest problem. God's great problem is sin.

Sin is the problem that weighs most heavily on God's heart. If the problem of sin could be solved, it would solve every other problem in the world. Now you might think that is too simplistic or too obvious. But it is true. Until the problem of sin is



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finally and fully solved, all other human problems will continue. All the suffering, heartache, pain, death, and tragedies of every description will keep on destroying lives unless the problem of sin can be solved forever. That is God's problem. And it leads us to a question: What is the ultimate solution to the sin problem?

Solving the sin problem requires a sacrifice

If we go back to the Garden of Eden, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God introduced them to the concept of a sacrifice as the solution to their sin. The Bible says that God clothed them with "tunics of skin" (Genesis 3:21). Before they sinned, they were clothed in robes of light, but now they were naked because of sin. As a result, God clothed them with skins. Where did those skins come from? They came from animals; there was no other source. They were clothed with the skins of animals offered as a sacrifice because of their sin.

Why was a sacrifice necessary as soon as sin appeared? Why did God have Adam and Eve offer a sacrifice at the gates of the Garden following their sin? Is it because God is bloodthirsty? No. It is because solving the problem of sin requires a sacrifice.

God had warned Adam and Eve that sin would result in death (Genesis 3:3). The Bible repeats and confirms this: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin results in death, and God had to reveal this fact—this horrible fact about sin—to Adam and Eve. They deserved to die because of their sin, but a substitute died in their place. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2), but God has a plan to solve the sin problem and restore harmony, peace, and joy in the universe. God's plan requires a sacrifice, a substitute, to suffer the results of sin so that sinners may be forgiven.

For centuries following Eden, the descendants of Adam and Eve—those who followed God—individually offered sacrifices to God (Genesis 31:54; 46:1). These sacrifices foreshadowed

the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus and revealed to those offering the sacrifices something of the real nature of sin and what was required for God to deal with it. These sacrifices, offered by individuals, continued from Eden to the time of the Exodus. But when God led Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He instituted a formal system of sacrifices that revealed more completely His plan of salvation—the way He would solve the sin problem. He told Moses, “Let them [the Israelites] make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). Only God can solve the sin problem. And He revealed His plan to deal with sin in the ancient sanctuary of Israel.

God reveals Himself in the sanctuary

The psalmist Asaph wrote:

Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary;
Who is so great a God as our God?
You are the God who does wonders;
You have declared Your strength among the peoples
(Psalm 77:13, 14).

I see three important things in these verses. First, God's way, His method of dealing with sin, lies in the sanctuary. This fact underlines the importance of understanding the sanctuary—the importance of the topic of the book you hold in your hands.

Second, He is a God who does wonders. He works wonders in human lives—in your life and mine. As you study His “way” in the sanctuary, you are going to sense God's Spirit in your life. God is going to move in your life in wonderful, powerful ways. You will sense freedom from anxiety and freedom from guilt. You will find a new power in your life, and you will see more clearly how God is going to deal with the sin problem both in

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your heart and in the universe. He is a God who does wonders!

And the third thing I see in these verses is that God redeems His people. The whole purpose of the sanctuary is to reveal God's plan to get us out of this world where sin, suffering, and sorrow are the norm. There must be something more than famine in this world. There must be something more than war. There must be something more than heartache, sorrow, tears, and disappointment. There must be something more than the grave's dark hole in the ground and long night without morning. And there is! God's sanctuary reveals, in very practical terms, how God will end this problem of sin in the universe.

The sanctuary is God's answer to sin

Have you ever wondered why wickedness is so prevalent in our world? Have you ever asked, "Why do good people suffer and wicked people triumph?" If so, you are not alone. Thousands of years ago, the psalmist Asaph asked the same question. In Psalm 73, he wrote about the suffering he saw in the world around him and the wickedness he observed. He asked himself why the wicked prosper. Then he wrote,


When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—
Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end (verses 16, 17).

It was painful for him to think about the violence and oppression and inequality that he saw all around him—until he went into the sanctuary of God! When he entered the sanctuary by faith and saw God's plan for dealing with sin, then he understood that there would come an end to evil and wickedness. In the sanctuary, he found a refuge; he found peace, security, and assurance

that God was in control and that the sin problem would be solved. Sin would come to an end and be no more.

That can be our experience as well. As we look out and see famine, war, disease, and death everywhere in the world, it is painful. We cannot understand why the wicked triumph. But in the sanctuary, we find God's answer to sin—God's eternal solution to the sin problem. And then we understand.

That is why, after He had delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, God told Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). You see, sin had separated human beings from God and had created a great chasm between them. God wanted to bridge that chasm and dwell among His people—reveal His love to them. And the sanctuary made that possible. As we study this topic, we will discover that every aspect of the sanctuary reveals God's love. Every aspect of the sanctuary reveals God's care and His goodness. The sanctuary reveals God's answer to the problem of sin.



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Offering ourselves as living sacrifices

God said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary." Then He gave detailed instructions of just exactly how it was to be built and what it was to be made of. Later in our study, we will look at the construction of that amazing building; we will look at the various items in it. And we will get a better idea of what was involved in carrying out God's instructions. But if God were to ask you to make Him a sanctuary, would you have the skill

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to actually make the different parts of that building and all the items in it? Do you think those Israelites, who had just come out of slavery in Egypt, knew how to work with wood, metal, and fabric to make all those things the way God asked them to? Would they naturally have the skill to weave those fine linens and multicolored tapestries of purple and gold? Would they have had the skill to make a beautiful candlestick of gold? Not likely. So how were they to carry out God's instructions? Exodus 35 says that God filled various individuals with

“wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. . . .

“ . . . He has filled them will skill to do all manner of work”
(verses 31–33, 35).

It was God who gave the workers—both men and women—the wisdom and skill to build the sanctuary (verses 23–26). This underlines an important lesson for us today. When God calls you to do something, He will give you the skill, the ability, to do it.

If you are a single mother raising three children and are feeling really stressed, the God who gave the Israelites the skills to build the sanctuary will give you the skill to handle your stressful situation. If you are worried about finances and are just struggling to survive, God will enable you to find a way to meet your needs. If you are taking care of an elderly parent and your life is filled with overwhelming responsibilities, God will give you the ability to relate to the challenging situation joyfully. Whatever God asks you to do, He enables you to do it. The sanctuary teaches that if you are faithful to God, He will give you the ability to handle whatever He allows to come your way.

There is something else really interesting about God's command that the Israelites build a sanctuary. Following God's instructions required a large amount of precious and costly materials. Not long before, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. Where did they get the gold and silver and bronze, the precious gems, and the rich fabrics needed to prepare all the things God asked them to make? They got them from the Egyptians when they left! When they came out of Egypt, they came out with riches from their former masters. "Now the children of Israel . . . had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested" (Exodus 12:35, 36).

The Israelites had labored in Egypt as unpaid slaves, and now they claimed what they were owed. Notice the Bible says that the Egyptians did as the Hebrews asked because the Lord intervened to cause them to look favorably on His people. The lesson for us is this: God provides. God provided for His people then, and He will provide for you today. We may not know where to turn, but God provides the things we need—the deepest needs of our lives.

There is yet another important lesson in this. When gold and silver and gems were needed to construct the sanctuary, the Israelites could have kept these things for themselves. But they did not. Moses called upon the people to bring offerings of these precious things in order to build the sanctuary, and the people responded willingly. In fact, they were so generous with their gifts and offerings that they brought more than was needed! Moses had to proclaim throughout the camp that the people should stop giving! The Bible says, "The people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much" (Exodus 36:6, 7).

There is a law of life that says, "It is more blessed to give than

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to receive” (Acts 20:35). And this applies not just to material things. When we give love to others, we are blessed by receiving love in return. When we serve with kindness and compassion, our own hearts are filled with grace and goodness. The Israelites gave willingly in order to build the sanctuary. “Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing,

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and they brought the LORD’s offering for the work of the tabernacle. . . . They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart” (Exodus 35:21, 22). There is something about the sanctuary, God’s tabernacle, that stirs the heart and makes us willing to serve Him and others with our offerings and with our lives. It is because the sanctuary shows us so clearly the love God

has for us and how much He Himself is willing to sacrifice so that we can have forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Understanding the sanctuary gives us a willing spirit to do whatever God asks us to do.

That is the real question of Christianity: Who has your heart? It is not a problem to have money; the problem is if money has you! And the whole meaning of the sanctuary and every sacrifice offered in its ceremonies is found in giving ourselves as living sacrifices to the Sovereign of the universe. As the apostle Paul put it, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1, 2).

By offering yourself as a living sacrifice to God, you are recognizing that He created you, He fashioned you. You are not some genetic accident—just flesh and bones and nothing more. When you offer yourself as sacrifices were offered in the sanctuary, you are acknowledging that God has redeemed you and He has a plan for your life. You are saying, “God take my heart!” Ellen White wrote, “We need not be discouraged. Jesus came to our world to bring divine power to man, that through his grace, we might be transformed into his likeness. When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and he makes up for the deficiency with his own divine merit.”¹

We come to God with all our faults and imperfections, just as the sinner in Bible times came to the sanctuary to offer a sacrifice, confessing his or her sin. Not perfect. Not without sin. But with a heart to obey, a desire to obey, and a desire to be forgiven and serve God with all our hearts. And when we come to Him with that attitude and do our best, Jesus accepts us and makes up for all that we lack! Isn’t that wonderful news? Praise His holy name!

That is what the sanctuary can teach us. There is an answer to the problem of sin. There is forgiveness in the sanctuary, forgiveness in the heart of God, for every sinner who comes in repentance, offering himself or herself as a living sacrifice. Putting forth his or her best effort to serve God and relying on the Savior, the Lamb of God, to make up for any deficiencies.

So let us learn more of the wonderful truths to be found in God’s sanctuary. Come with me as we study together and understand it better.

1. Ellen G. White, “Faith and Works,” *Signs of the Times*, June 16, 1890.