FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGY

Although the Sabbath and the second coming of Jesus are foundational doctrines for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, other Christian denominations also hold these beliefs. What makes Adventism unique in its theological contribution is the understanding of the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary. This biblical teaching formed the foundation of the church’s theology. While some have tried to attack this doctrine, when its implications are properly understood the sanctuary not only emerges as biblically true, but it also portrays in most vibrant tones the beauty of God’s relationship with His people.

For most of us, the sanctuary is often understood as a temporary structure and teaching that was put in place by God to eradicate sin. In this lesson we will discover how the sanctuary was established long before the plan of salvation, serving as a worship center of praise for our Creator. We will also explore its value in relation to education.
inScribe

Write out Exodus 25:1–9 from the translation of your choice. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
THE DWELLING PLACE

The sanctuary that Moses was instructed to build was an inclusive work. Its very construction was intended to include contributions from everyone. It was also a heart work, meaning that only people who had willing hearts were to make an offering. As God was not desperate for materials, the beneficiaries of this project were to be prompted to give an offering to God. The materials used to construct the structure were intended to be functional but also aesthetically pleasing. There was both a practical and artistic component to the sanctuary. Aside from all these elements, there was an ultimate purpose for the sanctuary: “Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it” (Ex. 25:8, 9).

“Let Them”

One of the first observations of the sanctuary that rises to the surface is that the building of the structure was committed to the hands of people. God did not make the sanctuary Himself—He asked human beings to make it for Him. Obviously, the reason for this arrangement is not that God was unable to make the sanctuary. After all, He gave explicit instructions on how the structure was to be built. Verse 2 describes their efforts to be considered an offering out of their free will and from their hearts. We see that any human effort put forth into communion with God will always be blessed by His presence.

“That I”

God is the initiator, not the Israelites. It is God who speaks to Moses; it is God who asks for the sanctuary to be built; it is God who wants to dwell among His people. God wants what we want more than we want it.

Creation happened because God wanted us to exist. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God went searching for them in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). In the parables of Luke, God is portrayed as searching, sweeping, and yearning for the lost. The valuable lesson that the sanctuary teaches us regarding the work of education is that God not only knows our heart’s desire—He is more invested in our success than we are.

The Pattern

God also speaks of a blueprint associated with the sanctuary, “that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings” (Ex. 25:9). The sanctuary built by Moses in the wilderness was type, pattern, or mold of an original. Just as a mold can serve as an imprint on a variety of surfaces and textures, so the original heavenly sanctuary serves as a pattern for the Israelites in the wilderness, as well as a lesson book for education today.
The sanctuary structure built by Israel was not done as a favor to a homeless God. “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). Instead, it was a symbolic structure of God’s heavenly temple, His home, where He invited His creation to come for intimate fellowship with Him. This is the point that the book of Hebrews seeks to make: “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24).

Your Body
Jesus said, “‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands’” (Mark 14:58). In speaking of His resurrection, He was referring to His own body being a temple or sanctuary. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). Aside from the Old Testament temple, the Bible also refers to our bodies as being sanctuaries of God—models of the reality of heaven.

The Garden of Eden
There are only two places where God plants: He plants a garden in Eden, and He plants Himself in the sanctuary. In the original text, there is a relation between Genesis 2, where God plants, and Exodus 25, where He dwells. The ancient sanctuary of Israel had three main components: the courtyard, the holy place, and the most holy place. Similarly, Adam and Eve had their own sanctuary with three components: Eden, their home located east of Eden, and the midst of the garden.

The Sanctuary in Time
The sanctuary and the Sabbath have significant parallels. The sanctuary is present at creation in the Garden of Eden, and the Sabbath is present at the conclusion of creation. The Sabbath has allusions to creation and so does the sanctuary. Of creation, the Bible says, “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done. . . Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Gen. 1:31–2:3). Exodus 39 and 40 have similar language: “Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them” (Ex. 39:43). Notice the parallels in the concepts: saw // looked, very good // just so, made // done, blessed // sanctified.

The Sanctuary and Education
From Mount Sinai in the wilderness where Israel sojourned, God desired to reveal His splendid standard for character—the ideal established at Creation, where Adam was created as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Beholding the character of God, Moses declared, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). The sanctuary was to serve as the second piece of God’s plan not only to present Israel with an ideal to attain but also with a means by which such character could be attained. “Another lesson the tabernacle, through its service of sacrifice, was to teach—the lesson of pardon of sin, and power through the Saviour for obedience unto life” (Education, 36).
inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 17:24–28
1 Corinthians 6:19, 20
John 1:1–5, 14

What other verses come to mind in connection with the sanctuary?

GOD WITH US

Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of everything the sanctuary seeks to teach.

“His name shall be called Immanuel, ... God with us.” “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ.” From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was “the image of God,” the image of His greatness and majesty, “the outshining of His glory.” It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be “God with us.” Therefore it was prophesied of Him, “His name shall be called Immanuel” (The Desire of Ages, 19).

From the beginning of creation, it has always been God’s purpose to be one with His people. In the beginning He was revealed in all of creation—the heavens, the earth, the mountains, flowers, and streams. All these pointed to the Father’s great love for us. Earth was His sanctuary, and He shared it with us. When sin tried to erase God’s perfect handwriting, hints of God’s love still lingered. For example, though roses now have thorns, they still carry the fragrance of God’s love for His children.

With the entrance of sin, the seed of Satan’s selfishness took root in the heart of humanity. To manifest the love of the Father once again, God declared to Moses, “Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). The purpose of the sanctuary was to turn the eyes of God’s people to His Son. Although the sanctuary was a great model of God’s purpose to make us holy, it had a major lack. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Therefore, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Finally, turning away from all shadows and figures, we have God with us in Jesus Christ. The I AM not only became one of us but also pitched His tent among us. He planted Himself in our experience. Through His sacrifice, He became like us so that through our sacrifice, we might become like Him (Rom. 12:1, 2). When the great plan of redemption is complete and sin has been eradicated, one thing will remain: “ ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself with be with them and be their God’ ” (Rev. 21:3). Amen!
UNTO ISRAEL

“In the building of the sanctuary as a dwelling place for God, Moses was directed to make all things according to the pattern of things in the heavens. God called him into the mount, and revealed to him the heavenly things, and in their similitude the tabernacle, with all that pertained to it, was fashioned.

“So to Israel, whom He desired to make His dwelling place, He revealed His glorious ideal of character. The pattern was shown them in the mount when the law was given from Sinai and when God passed by before Moses and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.’ Exodus 34:6 . . .

“Great was the privilege and honor granted Israel in the preparation of the sanctuary; and great was also the responsibility. A structure of surpassing splendor, demanding for its construction the most costly material and the highest artistic skill, was to be erected in the wilderness, by a people just escaped from slavery. It seemed a stupendous task. But He who had given the plan of the building stood pledged to co-operate with the builders. . . .

“The education of the Israelites included all their habits of life. Everything that concerned their well-being was the subject of divine solicitude, and came within the province of divine law. Even in providing their food, God sought their highest good. The manna with which He fed them in the wilderness was of a nature to promote physical, mental, and moral strength. Though so many of them rebelled against the restriction of their diet, and longed to return to the days when, they said, ‘We sat by the fleshpots, and when we did eat bread to the full’ (Exodus 16:3), yet the wisdom of God’s choice for them was vindicated in a manner they could not gainsay. Notwithstanding the hardships of their wilderness life, there was not a feeble one in all their tribes. . . .

“In the laws committed to Israel, explicit instruction was given concerning education. To Moses at Sinai God had revealed Himself as ‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.’ Exodus 34:6. These principles, embodied in His law, the fathers and mothers in Israel were to teach their children. . . .

“Not as a dry theory were these things to be taught. Those who would impart truth must themselves practice its principles. Only by reflecting the character of God in the uprightness, nobility, and unselfishness of their own lives can they impress others.

“True education is not the forcing of instruction on an unready and unreceptive mind. The mental powers must be awakened, the interest aroused. For this, God’s method of teaching provided. He who created the mind and ordained its laws, provided for its development in accordance with them. In the home and the sanctuary, through the things of nature and of art, in labor and in festivity, in sacred building and memorial stone, by methods and rites and symbols unnumbered, God gave to Israel lessons illustrating His principles and preserving the memory of His wonderful works. Then, as inquiry was made, the instruction given impressed mind and heart.

“In the arrangements for the education of the chosen people it is made manifest that a life centered in God is a life of completeness. Every want He has implanted, He provides to satisfy; every faculty imparted, He seeks to develop.

“The Author of all beauty, Himself a lover of the beautiful, God provided to gratify in His children the love of beauty. He made provision also for their social needs, for the kindly and helpful associations that do so much to cultivate sympathy and to brighten and sweeten life.”

(Education, pp35, 36, 38, 40, 41)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How are all the doctrines of the church linked to the sanctuary?

If the main passage could be distilled, how could it be articulated?

What are initial challenges to understanding the sanctuary better?

What are ways to overcome these challenges?

Where are moments in your life when pardon for sin and power for life are made real?

What are ways the sanctuary parallels Jesus?

What are ways Jesus exceeds the provisions of the sanctuary?

What has the sanctuary taught or reminded you of this week about salvation?