

## 11. New Covenant Sanctuary (2Q 2021—The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant)

**Biblical Material:** Exod. 25:8; Isa. 53:4–12; Heb. 10:4; Heb. 9:14, 15; Heb. 8:1–6; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6.

### Quotes

- They [the Israelites] had drifted so far away that they could not comprehend how God could live with them, being-invisible, so God said, “Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” (Ex. 25:8) The pillar of cloud above the tabernacle and God’s visible presence manifested within, helped the Israelites more easily to comprehend the real abiding presence of the Lord with them. *Stephen Haskell*
- Not only is there no need of an intermediary through whom He would want you to speak to Him, but He finds His delight in having you treat with Him personally and in all confidence. *Alphonsus Liguori*
- Mankind have banned the Divinity from their presence; they have relegated him to a sanctuary; the walls of the temple restrict his view; he does not exist outside of it. *Denis Diderot*

### Questions

What is the image of Christ in the sanctuary meant to accomplish in our relationship to God? What is important about identifying Jesus as our high priest? What does Jesus mean when he says he will *not* pray the Father for us? How does this clear statement impact our understanding of his priestly ministry?

### Bible summary

Exod. 25:8 is God’s call for the people of Israel to make him a sanctuary. In Isa. 53:4–12 we read of the “suffering servant,” Jesus. Heb. 10:4 tells us the blood of bulls and goats can’t remove sins. “Jesus has been given a far better ministry just as he is the one who mediates a far better agreed relationship between us and God, which is based on much better promises.” Heb. 8:6 FBV. Jesus is the one who provides the new covenant. Only Jesus can heal us from the damage of sin. (Heb. 9:14, 15). The earthly sanctuary is only a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, so cannot be equated (Heb. 8:1–6), Jesus is the one who shows us God (1 Tim. 2:5, 6).

### Comment

Let’s be clear from the beginning—the Bible does not speak specifically about a “new covenant sanctuary.” Yes, there is a sanctuary, and yes there is a “new covenant,” (which was prefigured in the Old Testament), but there is no “new covenant sanctuary.” Add to that the very clear observation from Hebrews that “it’s impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to remove sins.” (Heb. 10:4 FBV). So the whole of the Old Testament sanctuary system must be understood in terms of symbols, not in actuality.

In addition, the earthly sanctuary was “a mere shadow of what is in heaven.” Hebrews 8:5 FBV. So think about it. How much information would you receive from seeing a person’s shadow? Would you be able to tell their hair color? No. Their eye color? No. Their complexion? No. Maybe you wouldn’t even be able to tell their gender. You could see if they were a child or an adult, but not much more than that. That’s the same with the shadow that is the earthly sanctuary. It really only provides some very simple and basic information of the plan of

salvation. So to take the shadow “copy” and then say this is exactly what is in heaven is erroneous. However, this is all too often what we do, and as a result God’s good news is distorted and misapplied. Even when we take the actual physical objects and rituals of the earthly sanctuary and try and explain what they symbolize, we can get it wrong.

It’s far better to understand that God was attempting to get across to a group of people whose religious experience and understanding was very different to us his good news of healing transformation, of the vital importance of trusting him completely for salvation. In reality, only when Jesus came did we gain a true understanding of the nature and character of God, and to understand Jesus’ life and ministry by the Old Testament is to get the perspective the wrong way round. Jesus is the key, not the symbols.

When we consider the sanctuary on earth, we need to realize that it was given to God’s people of the time as a teaching aid, a help to their understanding of God. Rightly understood, the sanctuary was a wonderful blessing. But as so often happens, people took the symbols instead of reality, the ceremonies instead of a deep personal relationship with God. As a result, today as well as then, it’s all too easy to become bogged down in the minutiae rather than see the whole sanctuary message as a demonstration of the true nature and character of God.

The book of Hebrews is very much a case in point. It was written to help Jewish people understand how Christ fulfilled the sanctuary and its systems, using language they would comprehend. It was to lead them from Judaism to Christianity, and not the other way around. The coming of Christ ended the need for the old systems, because now God had been revealed in person. The essential point is to understand the whole system in a way that does not revert to legalistic observance. It can be very helpful to read Hebrews in a modern version. For example, using J.B. Phillips’ translation of Hebrews 3 is a great help since he uses the concept of “not giving up trust” instead of the term “unbelief.” This points to the centrality of trusting God in the whole of Hebrews, and gives a greater insight—since we can perhaps more readily understand the importance of trust, while unbelief can be seen simply as a refusal to operate according to statements of belief or dogma.

The danger in looking too much at the sanctuary is that we spend our time on the symbols and the practices, and don’t see God. For as is so often mentioned yet so little practiced, the sanctuary was a picture book, a teaching device, an illustration to help an illiterate band of wanderers the fundamental truths about God and salvation. So instead of asking for an interpretation of every piece of furniture, let us ask what insights into the nature and character of God are provided by the sanctuary. As Hebrews concludes: “They’re just religious regulations—about food and drink, and various ceremonies involving washing—which were put in place until the time of God’s new way of relating to him.” Hebrews 9:10 FBV. In other words, they were teaching tools on the way to truth, but they were not the truth. Jesus is the truth—and what is the truth he came to reveal? The full truth about God, and the solution of the issues in the Great Controversy, and how he could save us from ourselves. It is only from that perspective that the sanctuary makes sense.

### **Ellen White comment**

All who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time, and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. {Ev 222}