

# The Heavenly Sanctuary<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 28

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Jeremiah 23:23, 24; Psalm 89:14; Revelation 4; Revelation 5; Psalm 11:4–7; Deuteronomy 25:1; Hebrews 8:1, 2.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Then listen to them from heaven. It’s [it is] the place where you live. Listen to their prayer. Listen to them when they ask you to show them your favor’ ” (1 Kings 8:49, Nlrv).

**“WHERE DOES GOD LIVE?”** The innocent question of a six-year-old can be quite hard to answer. This is because it can easily lead to more difficult ones, such as, “If God lives in one place, how is it possible that He is everywhere?” Or, “Does God need a home?” Or, “If He does not need one, why does He have one?” Or, “If He does need one, why does He need it?”

Good questions. We know very little; so, the questions are not easy to answer.

Still, we can answer with what we do know. As Seventh-day Adventists, we know from the Bible that God lives in heaven. We know that He is working hard for us in heaven. And the center of His work is in the heavenly sanctuary.

The Bible is clear. The heavenly sanctuary is a real place. From it, we can learn truths about the character (who God is) and work of our God. So, the purpose of this week’s lesson is to study the heavenly sanctuary and to learn what God is doing there for us. After all, what God is doing in the sanctuary is really for us.

1. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

**SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 29****GOD'S HOME (1 Kings 8:49)**

We often say, "God is everywhere." Or we say that He is "omnipresent," which means that He is everywhere in the universe. " 'Am I only a God who is nearby?' . . . 'Am I not a God who is also far away?' . . . 'Don't I [Do I not] fill heaven and earth?' " (Jeremiah 23:23, 24, NIV). David understood, too, that nobody can escape from God (Psalm 139). And Paul argues that God is close to everyone, at least in a spiritual sense (Acts 17:27, 28).

But God is not only everywhere. His life is also eternal. God does not have a beginning or an end (Psalm 90:2). He has always been and will always be (Jude 25).

**Read 1 Kings 8:49 and Psalm 102:19. What do these verses teach us about the place where God lives? How are we to understand what this means? Can we understand it?**

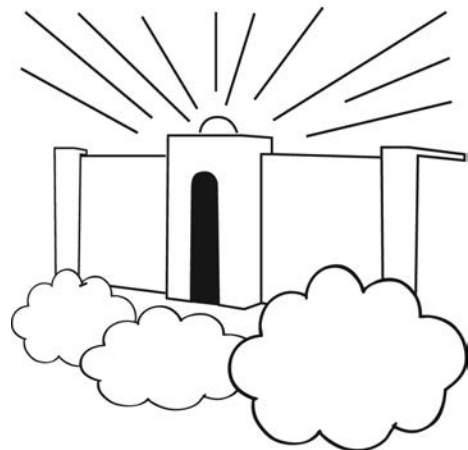
The Bible teaches us that God's home is in heaven (1 Kings 8:30, 43, 49). Does this mean that God is more in heaven than He is anywhere else? After all, God clearly lives in heaven in a special way, in His glorious presence and pure holiness. The greatest example of God's presence is in heaven.

But there is a difference between God's "general presence" and His "special presence." God is generally present everywhere. But He chooses

to show Himself in a special way in heaven and in the heavenly sanctuary.

Of course, we have to admit that we are limited in our understanding of God's physical nature. He is Spirit (John 4:24). And He cannot be limited to any building or place (1 Kings 8:27). Even so, the Bible shows heaven (John 14:1–3) and the heavenly sanctuary as real places (Hebrews 8:2) where God can be seen (Acts 7:55, 56; Revelation 4:2, 3). So, we have to believe that even heaven and the heavenly sanctuary are places where God comes to meet His people.

**There are many things that are difficult for us to understand, such as the dwelling place (home) of God. But the Bible says that this dwelling place is real. How can we learn to trust in all that the Bible teaches us, no matter how hard it is sometimes to understand? Why is it important for us to learn to trust even when we do not understand?**



**God's home in heaven is real.**

**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 30****THRONE ROOM (Psalm 47:6–9)**

**Read Psalm 47:6–9; Psalm 93:1, 2; and Psalm 103:19. What do these verses teach us about God and His throne?**

Several visions of the heavenly throne appear in the Bible. Most show some kind of group meeting in heaven with God as King. Most of them deal with humans. They show God acting for or speaking for the righteous (holy) people.

The Bible also shows God as King. For example, the Lord as King is often used as a theme in the Psalms. God is not only King of heaven but also “King of all the earth” (Psalm 47:7, NKJV). He is King both in the future and in the here and now (Psalm 93:2).

Therefore, God’s throne in heaven means several things to us. One of these things is that God is the strongest One in all the universe.



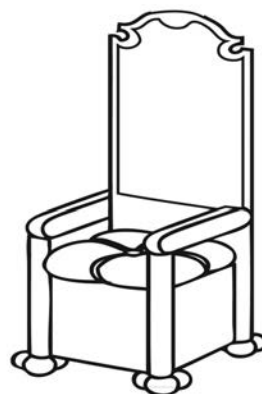
Jesus is King of heaven and earth and the whole universe.

**Read Psalm 89:14; Psalm 97:2. What do these verses teach us about the character of God and how He rules?**

God rules with righteousness (holiness), justice, love, and truthfulness. His character describes how He acts in the human world and shows His position in the entire universe. It is the same character God wants His people to show in their lives (Micah 6:8; compare Isaiah 59:14). To show His character in our lives is our special honor and right.

“The earth should show its treasures by obeying God’s natural laws. In the same way, God’s people should show His character by obeying His moral law [the Ten Commandments].”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 144.

**How can we better show goodness, righteousness, and justice in a world filled with evil, unrighteousness, and injustice? Why must we show these things?**



God’s throne in heaven means that He is the strongest One in the universe.

**TUESDAY—OCTOBER 1****WORSHIP IN HEAVEN  
(Revelation 4)**

**Read Revelation 4 and Revelation 5. What do these two chapters teach us about the heavenly home of God? In what way is the plan of salvation<sup>2</sup> shown in these verses?**

The vision of the heavenly throne room is a vision of the heavenly sanctuary. This is made clear from the language describing the Hebrew religious system. For example, the words for door and trumpet in Revelation 4:1 appear in the descriptions of the sanctuary in the Septuagint (a very old Greek translation of the Old Testament). The three precious stones in Revelation 4:3 are part of the High Priest's breastplate. The seven lampstands in Revelation 4:5 make us think of the lampstands in Solomon's temple. The twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4 remind us of the twenty-four divisions of service for the temple priests throughout the year and their prayer offering in the golden bowls of "incense" (Psalm 141:2). All of these verses point back to the Old Testament worship service of the earthly sanctuary.<sup>3</sup>

In Revelation 5, the slain Lamb points to Christ's death as a sacrifice for our sins. Christ, the Lamb, is shown to be the only One able to offer

salvation to humanity. And He is proven to be worthy here because of His victory (Revelation 5:5), His sacrifice (Revelation 5:9, 12), and His being God (Revelation 5:13).

"Christ accepted becoming a human and put down His life as a sacrifice. In this way all people might have eternal life and become Christ-like through God's grace<sup>4</sup> and power."  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 141.

These two chapters, Revelation 4 and Revelation 5, describe God's throne. In doing so, they picture God's work for the salvation of all people. This work also has been shown to the other beings in heaven. This work is a key theme in the drama about the war between Christ and Satan.

**Think about what it means that Christ, as God Himself, accepted human form and died as our Substitute. Think about whatever wrongs you have done, knowing that you should be punished for them. But the punishment fell on Him instead. Why should this truth inspire (help) you to do everything better?**

**WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 2****COURT ROOM (Psalm 11:4–7)**

**Read Psalm 11:4–7 and Habakkuk 2:20. What else does God do in**

2. plan of salvation—God's plan for people to be saved.

3. earthly sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

4. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

### His temple in heaven? Why is this important for us to know?

Many psalms show that the Lord cares for the needs of His people. He cares about the wrongs done to them. Because of this concern, the Lord will take action to correct the issues (problems) of the people who cry out for help. He will “decide the case” and “let the one who isn’t [is not] guilty go free” and “punish the one who is guilty” (Deuteronomy 25:1, Nlrv). It is what any good judge would do.

When God judges, the throne room becomes a courtroom, and the heavenly throne becomes a judgment seat. The One who sits on the throne is the One who judges (read Psalm 9:4–8). During Bible times, in the area known as Israel today, kings often served as judges too.

God’s judgment involves both the wicked and the righteous people. The wicked receive a punishment similar to the one suffered by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But the righteous “will enjoy His blessing” (Psalm 11:6, 7, Nlrv). The throne room and judgment appear in Daniel 7:9–14. (These are important verses that we will study later.) There again, the judgment comes in two parts: a sentence of “not guilty” for the saints and a sentence of “guilty” for God’s enemies.

In the book of Habakkuk, Habakkuk asks God why He is silent about injustice (Habakkuk 1). But God answers that He will certainly judge (Habakkuk 2:1–5). While idols have no “breath” (KJV) or “spirit” (Habakkuk 2:19), the

Creator God sits in His throne in His temple, the heavenly sanctuary. And He is ready to judge.

The warning is, “ ‘Let the whole earth be silent in front of me [God]’ ” (Habakkuk 2:20, Nlrv). In other words, the proper attitude (feeling) toward God’s ruling and judging is respectful silence.

The place where God shows His special presence and where He is worshiped by the heavenly beings is the same place where He is giving righteous judgment for all humans. This is the sanctuary in heaven. God is just (fair). All our questions about justice will be answered in God’s time, not ours.

**We cry out for justice. But so often we do not see justice now. So, why must we trust in God’s justice? Without that promise, what hope do we have?**

## THURSDAY—OCTOBER 3

### PLACE OF SALVATION (Hebrews 8:1, 2)

**Read Hebrews 8:1, 2. What is Christ doing at the throne of God?**

The book of Hebrews teaches that Christ is working in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest. This means that in the sanctuary, His work is focused on our salvation. This is because He appears “in front of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24, Nlrv). He gives us mercy. He promises us that we will not be turned away. Instead,

we will receive grace (Hebrews 4:15, 16). This is because of what Jesus has done for us. As in the earthly sanctuary, the heavenly sanctuary is the place where forgiveness is given and cleansing is done for the sins of the believers (Hebrews 2:17). The Jesus who died for us is the same One now working in heaven for us.

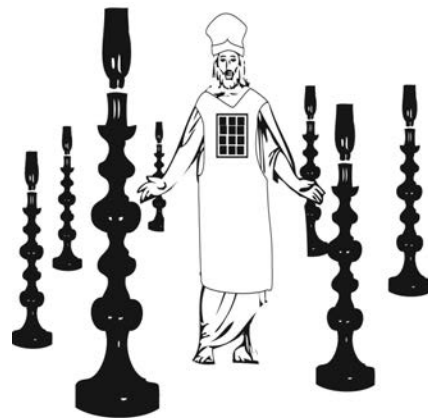
**Read Revelation 1:12–20; Revelation 8:2–6; Revelation 11:19; and Revelation 15:5–8. What sanctuary symbols are given in these verses?**

The verses in today’s study are just some of the places in the book of Revelation where sanctuary symbols are given. In fact, most of the important parts of the book often begin with a sanctuary scene.

The first introductory scene shows Christ, clothed as High Priest, walking among the seven lampstands (Revelation 1:12–20). The second scene shows the heavenly throne room. And the verses show many different sanctuary symbols: throne, lamps, sea, slain Lamb, blood, and golden bowls of incense (perfume) (Revelation 4; Revelation 5). The third scene shows the continuing service of the High Priest’s work for all people in the first apartment (room) of the heavenly sanctuary (Revelation 8:2–6). The fourth important scene gives us a look at the ark of the covenant<sup>5</sup> in the second apartment (room) (Revelation 11:19). The fifth

scene shows the entire tabernacle (sanctuary) in heaven (Revelation 15:5–8). The sixth scene is very special because it does not explain anything about the sanctuary. Maybe the reason for that is so the scene can show that Christ’s work there is finished (Revelation 19:1–10). The last scene is about the glorious (wonderful) Holy City on earth, which is pictured as “coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:1–8, NIV).

A careful study of these scenes shows that they are connected in a series. The series shows the steps in how God gives salvation to all people: from Christ on earth, to His heavenly ministry (work) in the first and second apartments (rooms), to the end of His high priestly ministry, and finally, to the new earth sanctuary.



Christ, our High Priest, walks among the lampstands.

#### FRIDAY—OCTOBER 4

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Paul had a look at heaven. It was so glorious

5. ark of the covenant—gold box carrying the Ten Commandments.

that he decided to not try to describe it. Paul tells us, ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has known what God has prepared for those who love him’ [1 Corinthians 2:9, NIV]. So you may try your best to imagine what the glory [beauty] of heaven is like. But your limited senses, weak and tired from hard work, cannot understand it. This is because God has no limits. It takes all of eternity to understand the glories and the treasures of the Word of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1107.

“The heavenly home [sanctuary] of the King of kings is where thousands upon thousands of angels serve Him. It is where ten thousand times ten thousand stand in front of Him (Daniel 7:10). It is where seraphim [six-winged angels], God’s shining guardians, cover their faces in awe and worship in front of God. It far surpasses [is greater than] the glory and beauty of the most wonderful structure [building] of the earthly sanctuary ever built by human hands. But it was the earthly sanctuary, and its services that taught important truths about the great work being done in the heavenly sanctuary for man’s

salvation.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*, page 414.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Look at the last statement in Friday’s study by Ellen G. White. What does she mean when she says that many “important truths” for our salvation were taught in the earthly sanctuary and through its services? What are some of those truths, and why are they important?
- ② What does it mean that God “lives” in heaven? How do you understand that idea?
- ③ This week’s lesson touched on the idea that the universe is watching the work that God is doing for humans. Why is this a very important idea for us to understand? How does this idea help us to understand the relationship between the great controversy theme and the whole plan of salvation? What does it tell us about the God who loves us so much that He would open ways for the universe to “test” Him?