

# West-Central Africa

## DIVISION

ADULT  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE  
July • Aug • Sept 2011

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# Worship

**Mission Project**

- 1 Church for Valley View University, Ghana.
- 2 CScience building for Adventist University Consedai, Cameroon.
- 3 Children's Project: School supply packets and invitations to attend Sabbath School.

For more information, visit [www.adventistmission.org](http://www.adventistmission.org)

Unions	Churches	Members	Population*
Central African Union Mission	976	128,321	38,828,000
Eastern Nigeria Union Mission	474	157,900	45,902,000
Ghana Union Conference	1,119	348,855	23,947,000
North-Western Nigeria Union Mission	357	113,665	102,169,000
Sahel Union Mission	154	42,491	107,850,000
West African Union Mission	107	43,667	10,951,000
<b>Totals as of June 30, 2009</b>	<b>3,187</b>	<b>834,899</b>	<b>329,647,000</b>
*Population as of January, 2009			

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



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WORSHIP

July • Aug • Sept 2011



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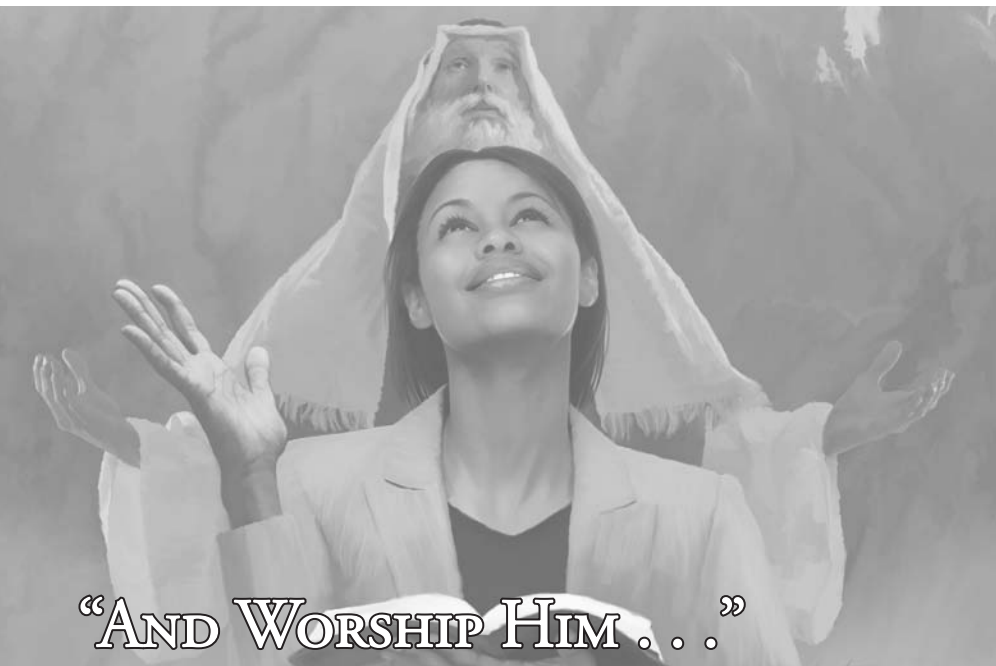
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**Sabbath  
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## “AND WORSHIP HIM . . .”

Some of the most well-known verses among Seventh-day Adventists are these: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (*Rev. 14:6, 7*). And though we view them in the context of last-day events, they also help form the foundation for our topic this quarter, which is worship. Not only are we called to worship, but we can, in these verses, find key themes to help us understand what true worship should be about.

First, John sees an angel having the “everlasting gospel,” the gospel of the everlasting covenant, the good news that Jesus Christ would come, take upon Himself humanity, and in that humanity die as a Substitute for the sins of the world. Foundational, then, to all our worship needs to be Jesus’ death in our behalf. Worship should center on our response to the substitutionary work of Christ, which includes not only the Cross but His ongoing ministry for us in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 8:1*).

Next, John tells us to “fear God.” Fearing God and loving God are two sides of the same coin: to fear God is to stand in awe, in reverence for who He is as Creator and Redeemer, in contrast to whom we are as the created and the redeemed. When

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we approach God in worship as a kind of buddy or pal, we degrade Him and place ourselves in a role in which we do not belong. Worship should be permeated by a sense of reverence and awe for our God, an attitude that will give us the humility and surrender so needed for true worship.

We are also told to “give glory to Him.” What is crucial here is that worship be about God and not about ourselves. We have to make sure that worship is not people-centered, culture-centered, or personal-needs-centered, but God-centered. We worship God, not ourselves; hence, worship must be about Him, about giving glory to Him, and not about music, culture, or worship styles.

We are told to fear God and give glory to Him. Why? Because “the hour of his judgment [has] come.” Christ is not only the Redeemer. He is also the Judge, a Judge who knows all our deepest and darkest secrets, a Judge who knows the innermost recesses of our hearts. As we worship, we need to do so with the sense of an accountability to God for what we do and a realization that we can hide nothing from Him, a fact that should drive us to the Cross, our only hope in this judgment.

Finally, we are told to worship the Creator. Creation is so foundational to all worship, because all that we believe, without exception, is based on the fact that God is Creator. We worship Him because He is Creator and because He is Redeemer and because He is Judge. Creation and Redemption and judgment are closely tied, and all true worship needs to be firmly rooted in these objective theological truths. How fascinating, too, that in Revelation 14:7 we find language reflecting the Sabbath commandment (*Exod. 20:11*), a day inseparably linked to the true worship of God.

This quarter, as we study worship, these motifs will appear again and again, for they are central to what true worship should be about. And with worship as such a central component of “present truth,” we would do well to learn what it means to truly worship the only One in all creation who, by virtue of who He is, is worthy of that worship.

*Worship should be permeated by a sense of reverence and awe for our God, an attitude that will give us the humility and surrender so needed for true worship.*

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# Got Questions?

## Sabbath School University *has answers!*

*Sabbath School University* is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on Hope Channel.



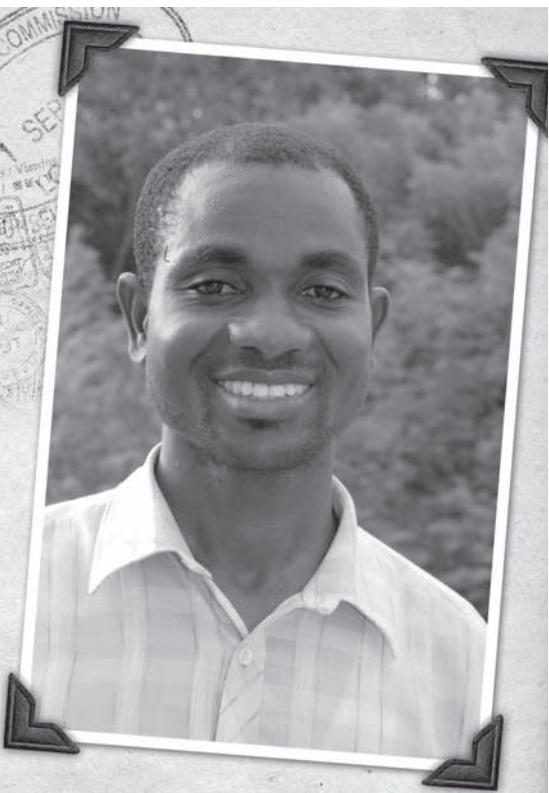
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## A Hole in the Heart of the Campus

There's a hole in the heart of the campus of Valley View University in Ghana. A God-shaped hole. When Valley View became a university recently, enrollment surged to more than 2,000 students. New dormitories and classroom blocks are

being built to accommodate the students, creating a heavy demand on the university's funds. The church has had to wait; the hole in the heart of the campus remains where the church will one day stand.

In the meantime, students worship in classrooms and in a cavernous metal-roofed auditorium above the school cafeteria. When rain pelts the roof or the power goes out, it's impossible to hear. Students at Valley View University, half of whom are not Adventist, need a church. I'm glad that this quarter part of my Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build a church at Valley View University and fill the hole in the heart of the campus. For me it's personal.



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# Worship *in* Genesis: Two Classes *of* Worshipers



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 3:1–13, 4:1–4, Titus 1:2, Gen. 6:1–8, 12:1–8, 22:1–18, 28:10–22.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’ ” (*Genesis 28:16, 17, NKJV*).

It has been said that, as human beings, we need to worship something. What we worship . . . well, that is a different matter, though it is one fraught with exceedingly important consequences, especially in the last days, when two groups of worshipers are made manifest: those who worship the Creator and those who worship the beast and his image.

Yet, the seeds for that contrast can be seen early on in the Bible. In the story of Cain and Abel, two kinds of worshipers appear, one worshipping the true God as He is supposed to be worshiped and one engaging in a false kind of worship. One is acceptable, one is not, and that is because one is based on salvation by faith and the other, as are all false forms of worship, is based on works. It is a motif that will appear again and again throughout the Bible. One type of worship is focused solely on God, on His power and glory and grace, the other on humanity and on self.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.*

## Worship in Eden

Genesis 1 records the story of Adam and Eve in their new home. The Creator of the universe had just designed and formed a beautiful new planet, crowning His work with the creation of the first family. The world came from Him perfect; in its own unique way, earth must have been an extension of heaven.

Genesis 2:1–3 then adds another element: the setting apart and making holy of the seventh day, an act tied directly to His work of creating the heavens and the earth, the act that forms the foundation of the fourth commandment—a day set aside for worship in a special way. Though Scripture does not say, one could imagine the kind of worship that these sinless beings, in the perfection of creation, gave to their Maker, who had done so much for them. (Little did they know, at that time, just how much He would end up really doing for them!)

**Read** the tragic story of the Fall in Genesis 3:1–13. **What changes now took place in Adam’s relationship to his Creator? Vss. 8–10. How did Adam respond to God’s questions to him? Vss. 11–13. What does his response reveal about what had happened to him?**

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After the Fall a whole lot of elements that certainly were not there before suddenly appeared. Just like that, in a moment of disobedience, the entire moral fabric of these beings changed. Instead of love, trust, and adoration, their hearts were now filled with fear, guilt, and shame. Instead of desiring His holy presence, they hid from Him. For Adam and Eve, their relationship with God, which surely impacted how they worshiped Him, had been shattered. The close and intimate communion with God they once enjoyed (*Gen. 3:8*) would now take a different form. Indeed, when God came to them, they “hid themselves” from His presence. So full were they of shame, guilt, even fear, they fled from the One who had created them.

What a powerful image of just what sin did—and still does—to us.

**Think about times in your life when some experience, perhaps some sin, made you feel guilt, shame, and the desire to hide from God. How did this affect your prayer life? What did it do to your ability to worship Him with your whole heart? Not a pleasant feeling, is it?**



## Worship Outside of Eden

After their expulsion, Adam and Eve began life outside the Eden paradise. Though the first gospel promise was given them there, in Eden (*Gen. 3:15*), the Bible does not show us any sacrifices being offered until after Eden (although one could extrapolate from Genesis 3:21 something of that nature, the text itself says nothing about sacrifice or worship). In Genesis 4, however, with the story of Cain and Abel, Genesis for the first time explicitly reveals a sacrificial system.

**Read** carefully the first recorded story of a worship service (*Gen. 4:1-7*). Why did God reject Cain's offering and accept Abel's?

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Cain and Abel represent two classes of worshipers that have existed since the Fall. Both of them built altars. Both came to worship God with offerings. But one offering was acceptable to God and one was not.

What made the difference? The answer has to be understood in the context of salvation by faith alone, the gospel, which was first given to Adam and Eve in Eden, though the plan itself was formulated before the world began (*Eph. 1:4, Titus 1:2*).

Cain's offering represented the attempt at salvation by works, the foundation of all false religion and worship. The fact is that the gap between heaven and earth is so great, so deep, that nothing sinful humans do could ever bridge it. The essence of legalism, of salvation by works, is the human attempt to do just that.

In contrast, Abel's offering of an animal reveals (however faintly) the great truth that only the death of Christ, the One equal with God (*Phil. 2:6*), could make the sinner right with God.

Hence, we are given a powerful lesson about worship: all true worship must center on the realization that we are helpless to save ourselves and that all our attempts at salvation by works are manifestations of Cain's action here. True worship must be based on a realization that only through God's grace can we have any hope of eternal life.

**Examine your own thoughts, motives, and inner feelings about worship. How Christ-centered is your worship, or might you be focusing too much upon yourself?**

## Two Lines of Worshipers

In Genesis 4, we start getting a hint of the moral degradation that was coming after the Fall. Lamech became a polygamist and then got involved in some sort of violence that brought fear into his heart. In contrast, Genesis 4:25, 26 shows that some people were seeking to be faithful, for at that time “men began to call on the name of the Lord” (*NKJV*).

**Read** Genesis 6:1–8. What process do we see taking place here, and why is it so dangerous? What results did this lead to?

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Little by little, the two classes of worshipers began to merge (*Gen. 6:1–4*). Yet, in spite of the great wickedness in the earth, there were holy men of giant intellect who kept alive the knowledge of God. Though only a few of them are mentioned in Scripture, “all through the ages God had faithful witnesses, truehearted worshipers.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 84. The wickedness of the human heart, however, became so great that the Lord had to wipe humanity out and start over.

Hence, the Flood.

**What** was the first thing the Bible records Noah as doing after he came out of the ark, and why is that important? *Gen. 8:20*.

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How fascinating that the first thing Noah does is worship. And central to that worship is the sacrifice. This is the first record of the patriarchs building a place of worship, an altar on which to offer their sacrifices. Thus, before doing anything else, Noah acknowledges his total dependence upon the Lord and upon the coming of the Messiah, who will give His life in order to redeem humanity. Noah knew that he was saved only through God’s grace; without it, he would have perished with the rest of the world.

**How do you daily show your acknowledgment of God’s grace in your life? Or more important, how should you show that acknowledgment?**

## The Faith of Abraham

**Read** Genesis 12:1–8. What do these verses reveal about Abram (later Abraham) and his calling by God?

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Abraham, a descendant of Seth, was faithful to God, even though some of his relatives had begun conforming to the worship of idols, which was so prevalent in their culture. But God called him to separate from his kindred and his comfortable surroundings in order to become the father of a nation of worshipers who would uphold and represent the true God.

No doubt he and Sarah influenced many to accept the worship of the true God. But there was another reason, too, why God called Abraham to father a new nation. “ ‘Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws’ ” (*Gen. 26:5, NKJV*). And another as well: “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (*Gen. 15:6*).

At the same time, however, Abraham had some crucial and painful lessons to learn.

**Read** Genesis 22:1–18. Why this terrible test for Abraham? What was the real message God wanted him to understand? *Vss. 8, 13, 14.*

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As we have seen, the plan of salvation centers on the death of Jesus, God’s Son, and from the start this death was symbolized by the sacrificial system of worship. While the Lord wanted people to use only animals, in the pagan cultures folk actually sacrificed their own children, something that God said He hated (*Deut. 12:31*). Whatever powerful personal lessons about faith and trust Abraham learned through this trial, this act stands through the ages as an incredibly powerful symbol of the centrality of the death of Christ for salvation. Abraham, we could imagine, got a small taste of the pain that the death of Christ must have caused the Father, yet only through Christ’s death could humanity be saved.

**Dwell on the kind of faith that Abraham exhibited there. It is truly amazing; one hardly can imagine it. What should this teach us about the weakness of our own faith?**

## Bethel, the House of God

Jacob and Esau, like Cain and Abel, represent two classes of worshipers. Esau's bold, adventuresome spirit appealed to his quiet, retiring father. Jacob, on the other hand, appeared to have a more spiritual nature. But he also had some serious character flaws. Jacob wanted the birthright, which legally belonged to his elder twin. And he was willing to become involved in his mother's deceptive scheme to obtain it. As a result, Jacob fled in terror to escape his brother's anger and hatred, never to see his beloved mother again.

**Read** the story of Jacob's flight (*Gen. 28:10–22*). Note the messages of encouragement and assurance God gave him through a dream. What was Jacob's response?

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This is the first mention in Genesis of “the house of God” (*vs. 17*). Though for Jacob it was only a pillar of stone, Bethel became a significant place in sacred history. Here Jacob worshiped the God of his fathers. Here he made a vow of faithfulness to Him. And here, like Abraham, he promised to return to God a tithe—a tenth of his material blessings—as an act of worship.

Notice Jacob's sense of fear and awe because of the presence of God. He must have understood better than ever before the greatness of God in contrast to himself, and thus the Bible records his attitude of fear, reverence, and awe. The next thing he does is worship. Here, too, we see a principle regarding the kind of attitude we should have in worship, an attitude that is revealed in Revelation 14:7, in the call to “fear God.”

Worship is not about approaching God as you would some buddy or pal. Our attitude should be that of a sinner in dire need of grace, falling before our Maker with a sense of need, fear, and gratefulness that God, the Creator of the universe, would love us and do so much in order to redeem us.

**How much awe, reverence, and fear do you have when you worship the Lord? Or is your heart hard, cold, and ungrateful? If the latter, how can you change?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 47–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 60–62; “Cain and Abel Tested,” pp. 71–74; “After the Flood,” pp. 105–107; “The Test of Faith,” pp. 148–153; “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 197–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“[Jacob’s] vow [at Bethel] was the outflow of a heart filled with gratitude for the assurance of God’s love and mercy. Jacob felt that God had claims upon him which he must acknowledge, and that the special tokens of divine favor granted him demanded a return. So does every blessing bestowed upon us call for a response to the Author of all our mercies. The Christian should often review his past life and recall with gratitude the precious deliverances that God has wrought for him. . . . He should recognize all of them as evidences of the watchcare of heavenly angels. In view of these innumerable blessings he should often ask, with subdued and grateful heart, ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?’ Psalm 116:12.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 187.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the topic of how righteousness by faith in what Christ has done for us should be at the center of all our worship. As you do, dwell on these questions: (1) Why do we worship Him? (2) What has He done that makes Him worthy of worship? (3) What purpose does our worship of God serve?
- 2 How can our worship services become a more effective tool in witnessing to the world who God really is and what He is like? What elements in worship, which we have considered in this week’s lesson, can be especially helpful in witnessing?
- 3 Review the story of Abraham’s giving his tithe to Melchizedek (*Gen. 14:20*). In what ways is tithing an act of worship? What are we saying to God when we return to Him our tithe?
- 4 Dwell more on the idea of fear and reverence in worship. Why is this an important element? What’s wrong with an attitude in worship that seems to put God on our own level, in which we relate to Him in worship with the same attitude we have toward a good friend and nothing more?

## Fervent Follower

Gustave looked at the advertisement for evangelistic meetings. He was curious about these Seventh-day Adventists, who, he was told, sinned by working in their gardens on Sunday in order to keep Saturday holy. Associating with Adventists was forbidden in his village in Burundi, a tiny country in central Africa. But Gustave loved religious meetings and decided to risk going.

The first message he heard touched his heart, and he returned the following weekend. He wished he could attend on school nights too. After the second weekend of meetings, Gustave asked the local elder where he lived. Gustave wanted to come and ask more questions about what he was learning. After studying the Bible with the elder for several weeks, Gustave asked to join the Adventist Church. His parents weren't happy, but they didn't forbid him to follow his faith.

Schools in Burundi held classes on Sabbaths, but Gustave skipped classes to attend church instead. One of his teachers warned him that if he continued missing classes on Sabbath he could be expelled. When Gustave's parents learned that he was skipping school, they accused him of becoming a rebel or being duped. "I'm not a rebel or a member of a political group," Gustave explained. "I just want to worship God." He invited his parents to follow his example or at least to allow him the freedom to worship as God was leading him.

Gustave tried to explain his faith to the school principal, hoping to be excused from classes. But the principal accused him of spreading a bad message through the school. Reluctantly, Gustave attended classes on Sabbath. But he tried to focus on Christ, not class work.

The next year Gustave transferred to another high school that didn't hold classes on Sabbaths. But it held mandatory religious groups that day. Gustave was the only Adventist student in the school, so he joined a Protestant group and became a leader. He shared his faith with his fellow students, and several wanted to know more. He studied the Bible with those who were interested, but most of the students' parents refused to let their children associate with Adventists.

When Gustave graduated from high school and began looking for work, his parents tried to force him to take a job that required Sabbath work. When Gustave refused, his parents refused to support him. At last he found a temporary job with ADRA.

Gustave advises young people to follow God's leading, no matter what troubles come their way. He thanks God for those who gave mission offerings so that Adventists in Burundi could hold the evangelistic meetings that led him to Jesus.

GUSTAVE NDAYAMBAJE *lives in southern Burundi.*

# Worship *and the Exodus*: Understanding Who God Is



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 3:1–15; 12:1–36; 20:4, 5; 32:1–6; 33:12–23.*

**Memory Text:** “‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me’ ” (*Exodus 20:2, 3, NKJV*).

In speaking to the woman at the well, Jesus said, “ ‘You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews’ ” (*John 4:22, NKJV*). Imagine, worshipping what you do not know. In a sense, that is what almost all the world has done, or perhaps is doing now—worshipping what they do not know. When you see someone bowing down and worshipping a block of stone, thinking it will answer their prayers, you are seeing people worshipping what they do not know. That is, they are worshipping what they think can bring them salvation but cannot. In a more modern context, people who make gods out of power, money, fame, and self are, likewise, worshipping what they do not know. They are worshipping that which cannot save them.

In the immediate Christian context, the question for us could be: do we know what we are worshipping? Do we know the Lord whom we praise and honor with our mouths? Who is He? What is His name? What is He like?

This week we will look at early accounts of the children of Israel and how their encounters with the Lord reveal to us more about the nature and the character of the God we profess to serve and worship. After all, what sense does it make to worship what we do not know?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.*

## Holy Ground

It would be one thing for Moses, living in the wilderness, to see a bush burning. That itself might not be such a remarkable event; he probably had seen things like that before. What he most likely never saw before, however, was that the burning bush was not consumed: it kept burning and burning. At that moment Moses knew that he was seeing a “great sight,” something remarkable, even supernatural.

**Read** Exodus 3:1–15. What foundational elements of true worship can be seen in these verses?

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Right from the start, we see here something of the holiness of God and the attitude in which we need to approach Him. It was God who told Moses to take off his shoes, for this was holy ground. The Lord was making clear the distinction between Himself—the Lord—and Moses, a sinner in need of grace. Reverence, awe, and fear—these are the attitudes that are crucial for us in order to engage in true worship.

Another important point is the God-centeredness of this experience. Moses’ first response to God was, “Who am I that I should go?” The focus was on himself—his needs, his weaknesses, and his fears. Soon after, however, he shifts from himself to God and what God would do. How crucial that all worship centers on the Lord, not on ourselves.

That leads to another crucial element in worship: that of salvation and deliverance. The Exodus from Egypt has stood symbolically for the salvation we all have in Christ (*1 Cor. 10:1–4*). God was not appearing to Moses just to make Himself known; He was appearing to him in order to let him know of the great work of deliverance that He was going to do on behalf of the children of Israel. In the same way, Jesus did not come to this earth merely to represent God and help us know more about Him. No, Jesus came to die for our sins, to give His life as a ransom, to die on the cross the death that we deserve. Through His death, of course, we know more and more about the character of God, but in the end Christ came to pay the penalty for our sins and thus give us true deliverance, the deliverance symbolized in part by what the Lord did for Israel in freeing the nation from Egypt.

**How much time do you spend thinking about the Cross and the deliverance we have been given through Jesus? Or do you spend more time thinking about other things, things that cannot save you? What are the implications of your answer?**



## The Death of the Firstborn: Passover and Worship

**“That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped”** (*Exod. 12:27*).

The Hebrew word translated “worshipped” in the above verse comes from a root that means “to bow down” or “to prostrate oneself.” The word itself almost always appears in a verb form that intensifies the meaning or that gives the idea of repetition. One almost could imagine a person bowing up and down, up and down, in reverence and awe and gratitude. Indeed, considering the context, that is not hard to see.

**Read** the story of that first Passover night, in Exodus 12:1–36. How is the gospel, which should be at the center of all our worship, revealed in these verses?

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Unless covered by the blood, the children of Israel would face the loss of their firstborn. For them, the firstborn (usually meaning the oldest son) had special privileges and responsibilities, only to later be replaced by the Levites (*Num. 3:12*). Israel itself was deemed the Lord’s “firstborn” (*Exod. 4:22*), indicative of its special relationship to the Creator. In the New Testament, Jesus has been called the “firstborn” (*Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18*).

Though the firstborn were spared here, in reality Christ “the firstborn” was to die, a death symbolized by the blood placed over the doors of the houses. This act stands as a powerful representation of the substitutionary death of Jesus. He died so that the “firstborn,” in a sense all God’s saved people (*see Heb. 12:23*), would be spared the death they deserve.

**In Egypt the people had obeyed their masters out of fear; now they would learn that true worship flows from a heart filled with love and gratitude to the One who alone has power to deliver and save. How can you learn to better appreciate and love the Lord? How does sin tend to dampen that love?**

## No Other Gods

Imagine the scene: Mount Sinai enveloped in a thick cloud, quaking with thunder, lightning flashing, trumpets blasting. The people trembled. Smoke filled the air because the God of Israel had descended in fire upon the holy mount (*Exod. 19:16–19*). There amid the cloud and the smoke, He revealed Himself in awful grandeur. Then the voice of their Deliverer proclaimed the first four commandments, all of which are directly linked to worship.

**Focus** on Exodus 20:1–6. What important points about worship can we take from those verses?

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The Ten Commandments begin with God’s reminder to the children of Israel of their deliverance. Only the Lord, the true God, the only God, could have done that for them. All other gods, such as the gods of Egypt, were false gods, human creations unable to save or deliver anyone. These “gods” also demonstrated selfish, demanding, and often immoral character traits that reflected their human origin. What a contrast to the Lord, the loving and self-sacrificing Creator and Redeemer. Thus, after centuries of being immersed in the crude polytheism of a pagan culture, the children of Israel needed to know their Lord and God as the only God, especially now as they were entering into the covenant relationship with Him.

**How** does that background help us better understand what the Lord said to them in Exodus 20:4, 5? Also, how can we take the principle seen there and apply it to ourselves today?

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Ellen G. White wrote, “Whatever we cherish that tends to lessen our love for God or to interfere with the service due Him, of that do we make a god.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305. Ask yourself: What, if any, are the gods in my life that are competing for affections, my time, my priorities, or my goals? What are they, and how can I remove them?

## “These Be Your Gods . . .”

**Read** Exodus 32:1–6 and answer the following questions:

**1. What event, what catalyst, first opened the way to this powerful expression of false worship? What lessons should we as Seventh-day Adventists take from it?**

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**2. What was this false God made of, and what does that say about how fruitless this kind of worship is?**

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**3. How did their worship of this statue contrast to their worship of the Lord?**

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They “rose up to play”; they “have corrupted themselves”; they “have turned aside quickly” (*Exod. 32:6–8*). Hardly seems to reflect the awe and reverence that is to mark true worship, does it?

The mixed multitude (Egyptians who had chosen to accompany Israel in the Exodus or who were married to Hebrews) no doubt influenced the people and demanded of Aaron the form and style of worship familiar to them. When Joshua heard the noise from below, he came to Moses suggesting that there was war in the camp. But Moses, having lived in the royal court of Egypt, knew all too well what those noises were. He probably recognized the sounds of licentious revelry—the dancing, the loud music, the singing, shouting, and general confusion that marked their idolatrous worship (*Exod. 32:17–22*).

When they worshiped the true God, they did so in humility and reverence. Now, worshiping before this calf of gold, they behaved like animals. They had “changed their glory into the image of an ox” (*Ps. 106:20, NKJV*). It does seem to be a principle of human nature that we rise no higher than that which we worship or revere.

**Notice how quickly and easily they compromised truth in their worship. Notice how quickly the local culture came in and turned them away from the true God. How can we make sure we, in our own worship, do not fall into the same trap?**

## “Show Me Your Glory”

In the golden calf experience, the people of Israel had broken their covenant with God; they had taken His name in vain by their sinful and false worship. Moses pled with God on their behalf (*Exod. 32:30–33*). Because of their terrible sin, God commanded His “stiffnecked” people to remove their ornaments so that He might “know what to do” to them (*Exod. 33:4, 5*). To those who, in humility, repented, the removal of their ornaments was a symbol of their reconciliation with God (*Exod. 33:4–6*).

**Read** Exodus 33:12–23. Why did Moses ask what he did of the Lord? What did Moses want to learn? Why did he believe that he needed these things?

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Moses’ desire to see God’s glory was not one of curiosity or presumption but came from a deep heart hunger to sense God’s presence after such blatant apostasy. Though Moses had not partaken of their sin, he was impacted by it. We do not live in isolation from other members of our church. What impacts one impacts others, a point we should never forget.

Look carefully at Exodus 33:13. Moses says to God that he, Moses, wanted to “know Him.” Despite all that the Lord had done, Moses still sensed his own need, his own weakness, his own helplessness, and thus he wanted a closer walk with the Lord. He wanted to know better the God upon whom He was so dependent. How interesting that, centuries later, Jesus said, “ ‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’ ” (*John 17:3*). He wanted to see the glory of God, something that would make him realize even more his own sinfulness and helplessness and, hence, his utter dependence upon the Lord. After all, look at what Moses had been called to do; look at the challenges he had to face. No wonder he felt this need to know God.

Here, too, we come to a crucial point about worship. Worship should be about God; it should be about us in humility and faith and submission, seeking to know more about Him and His “way” (*Exod. 33:13*).

**How well do you know the Lord? More important, what choices can you make that will enable you to know Him better than you do? How can you learn to worship in a way that will give you a better appreciation of God and His glory?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 303–314; “Idolatry at Sinai,” pp. 315–330; “Satan’s Enmity Against the Law,” pp. 331–342, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; Pss. 105:26–45; 106:8–23.

“Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, . . . as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be revered; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 252.

“True reverence for God is inspired by a sense of His infinite greatness and a realization of His presence. With this sense of the Unseen, every heart should be deeply impressed. The hour and place of prayer are sacred because God is there. . . . Angels, when they speak that name, veil their faces. With what reverence, then, should we, who are fallen and sinful, take it upon our lips!”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 48, 49.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss these aspects of God’s character: His nearness to us—and His greatness, majesty, and holiness. Theologians refer to these two concepts as His Immanence and Transcendence. Think of ways that these two important truths about God both can be emphasized and balanced in our worship services.
- 2 What lessons can we learn from the tragic story of Israel’s worship of the golden calf and the serious consequences of worshiping false gods (visible or invisible)? What are some of the idols that are commonly worshiped in your society? What lessons do you see in this story for the church today, for us who have been waiting a long time for the Lord to come?
- 3 What about our worship services? How can they better help us sense the majesty, the glory, and the power of God? Or do they tend to bring God down to our own level?
- 4 What does it mean to know the Lord? If someone were to ask you, “How do you know the Lord?” how would you respond? In other words, how can a human being come to know God personally?

# Blessing of Showers

by PAULINA DZIEGIELSKA

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist teenager in Poland, and attending summer camp and camp meeting at Camp Zatonie is an important part of my life. For many teenagers, camp is more about meeting friends we haven't seen for months than it is about the spiritual opportunities available there.

Two years ago, I went to camp looking forward to seeing my friends. But it was raining when we arrived. So, I decided to attend the meetings and save my visiting for when the sun came out. But the rain continued the entire two weeks of camp. So, each day I had to choose whether to spend my time in the rain with my friends, stay in my tent, or attend the meetings in the big tent. I didn't want to get soaked while visiting with friends, and there wasn't much to do inside my tent, so I went to hear the sermons.

I've grown up hearing good sermons, but I'd never been passionate about what I believe. So, I was surprised when I found the camp's speakers so compelling. I wasn't bored or tired. In fact, I found myself wanting to attend more and more meetings.

The youth speaker was a Polish pastor from Australia who helped me to see God in a different way. And I especially enjoyed the prayer meetings we held on the beach by the lake. We hardly noticed the rain as we talked to God together.

I did spend some time with my friends at camp. After all, it's the only time many of us get to see each other. But my attention was focused on God rather than on catching up with friends.

I joined a class with those who planned to be baptized at the end of the camp. When I told my friends, they were excited for me. Two of them even decided to be baptized with me. What a wonderful day that was!

For many believers in Poland, Camp Zatonie is at the heart of our faith.

Recently the camp received part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help upgrade the camp's buildings and programs so that more people can come to learn about God. Thank you for helping make this important ministry even better. I'm already planning to go to camp meeting next year. I wouldn't miss it!



PAULINA DZIEGIELSKA (left) lives in Warsaw, Poland.

# The Sabbath *and* Worship




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15, Isa. 44:15–20, Rom. 6:16–23, Matt. 11:28–30.*

**Memory Text:** “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (*Psalms 95:6, 7*).

As we saw in the introduction, Creation and Redemption are central to the first angel's message and the theme of worship. The first angel calls us to the “everlasting gospel,” the good news of salvation in Jesus, a salvation that includes not only forgiveness of sin but power over it. The gospel, then, promises us a new life in Christ, the promise of sanctification, which itself is part of the process of salvation and Redemption (*John 17:17, Acts 20:32, 1 Thess. 5:23*).

And, as we saw, the first angel's message includes a special reminder that the One whom we are to worship is our Creator, the One who made us and the world we live in.

Thus, linked to worship are the themes of Creation, Redemption, and sanctification. Not surprisingly, these three themes are revealed in the Sabbath, a crucial element in the events depicted in Revelation 14, when the question faces all of us: do we worship the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier or the beast and his image? The texts do not leave us any third option.

This week we will take a look at the Sabbath commandment and how these themes are revealed in this day. As we study, ask yourself, how can we make these themes central to our worship experience?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.*

## Creation and Redemption: The Foundation of Worship

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8*). The words *remember* and *memorial* in Hebrew come from the same Hebrew root, *zkr*. When God said “Remember,” He was giving the people a memorial of two great events, one the foundation of the other.

**According** to the fourth commandment, what are these two events, and how are they related to each other? *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15*.

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Christ’s role as Creator is inextricably linked to His role as Redeemer, and every week the Sabbath highlights both of these roles. Not monthly, not yearly, but weekly, and without exception—that is how important it is. The One who designed and made us is the same One who delivered Israel from Egypt and who delivers us from the bondage of sin.

**Read** Colossians 1:13–22. How does Paul clearly link Christ in His role as Creator and Redeemer?

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Creation and Redemption are at the foundation of all biblical truth, and they are so important that we have been ordered to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of these truths. From Eden, where the seventh day was first set aside, up until now, there have been people who have worshiped the Lord through keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

**Think for a moment how important these two truths must be for the Lord to have given us a weekly reminder of them; so important that He commands us to devote one-seventh of our lives in a special kind of rest in order that we can better focus our attention on these truths. How can your Sabbath-worship experience help enhance your appreciation of Christ as Creator and Redeemer?**

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## Remember Your Creator

The Bible begins with the famous line, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The verb “created,” *bara*, refers to actions of God only. Humans can build things, make things, create things, and form things, but God alone can *bara*. Only God can create space, time, matter, and energy—all part of the material world that we exist in. It is all here, only because God *bara*-ed it.

Of course, how He did it remains a mystery. Science barely understands what matter itself is, much less how it was created and why it exists in the form that it does. What is crucial, however, is that we never forget for a moment where it all came from. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (*Ps. 33:6, 9, NKJV*).

Also, when an important project is finished, people like to celebrate. For example, when we build a church, we dedicate it to God. Similarly, when God finished with the earth, He commemorated the event by setting aside a special day, the Sabbath.

**Compare** Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:12, 18; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2 to Isaiah 44:15–20; 46:5–7. What contrast is being made here?

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Ever since the great controversy between Christ and Satan reached the earth, the enemy has tried to lead people to doubt or deny the existence of the true God, the Creator. Through ignorance of His Word or denial of the evidence of His creative power, human intelligence seeks to find ways to explain our origins in ways other than from the Lord. All sorts of theories have been proposed. The most popular today, of course, is evolution, which posits random mutation and natural selection as the means by which all life and intelligence exist. Someone recently presented a theory that we are all just computer projections and that we do not really exist but are merely the computer creations of some super-race of alien beings. In many ways, one could argue that the wooden gods Isaiah wrote about, which were worshiped by their own makers, are as good as many of the other theories of origins often presented as an alternative to the God of the Bible.

**If we truly accept the Sabbath for what the Bible says it is—a memorial of God’s six days of Creation—how can we be protected from false ideas about our origins? Also, who would want to worship a God who used the vicious and violent process of evolution to create us, as some teach?**

## Freedom From Slavery

As we have already seen, the Sabbath points not only to Creation, an important theme of worship, but also to Redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (*NIV*). These words echo to the crucial theme of the first angel’s message, that of Redemption and salvation.

And this redemption is symbolized by what the Lord did for the children of Israel through the Exodus. No god in Egypt had the power to stop this nation of slaves from escaping their bondage. Only the God of Israel, who revealed Himself in powerful miracles and His presence in majestic and blinding glory, had the ability to deliver them with “a mighty hand” and a “stretched out arm” (*Deut. 5:15*). God wanted them to remember “that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him” (*Deut 4:35, NKJV*). So, He gave them the Sabbath day to be a constant reminder of His great deliverance and as a reminder to us of the bondage from which Christ has freed us.

**Read** Romans 6:16–23. What promises are offered us there, and how does this relate to what the Lord did for Israel in Egypt?

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The New Testament clearly teaches that the slavery of sin demands a powerful Savior, as did the Egyptian bondage of ancient Israel. That is what the children of Israel had in their Lord; and that is what we as Christians today have, as well, because the God who delivered them from their bondage is the same One who delivers us from ours.

If we ever needed a reason to worship the Lord, would it not be for the deliverance from slavery that He has won for us? The children of Israel sang a great song once they had been delivered. (*See Exodus 15.*) Thus, for us the Sabbath worship experience should be a celebration of God’s grace in freeing us not only from the legal penalty of sin (which fell upon Jesus on our behalf) but from the power of sin to enslave us.

**What does it mean to no longer be slaves to sin? Does it mean we are not sinful, or that we do not at times still sin? Most important, how can you learn to claim and make real the promises of freedom that the gospel offers us?**

## Remember Your Sanctifier

**Read** Exodus 31:13. What do you understand this to mean? How is it relevant for us today? What does it mean to have God sanctify us? How can we experience this process in our own lives?

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Creation, Redemption, sanctification—they all are related. Creation, of course, is the foundation of everything (for without it there would be no one to redeem and sanctify). Yet, in our fallen condition, creation is no longer enough; we needed Redemption, the promise of forgiveness for our sins. Otherwise, we would face eternal destruction, and our creation would be forever over.

Of course, inseparably linked to Redemption is sanctification, the process by which we grow in holiness and in grace in our lives. The word translated as “sanctify” in Exodus 31:13 comes from the same root word used in Exodus 20:8, when the Lord tells the people to keep the Sabbath “holy.” The same root appears in Exodus 20:11, which says that God “hallowed” or “made holy” the Sabbath day (see also Genesis 2:3, where God “sanctified” the seventh day). In all these cases the root, *qds*, means “to be holy,” “to set aside as holy,” to be “dedicated as holy.”

God called Israel and set them apart as His holy people, to be a light to the world. Christ called His disciples to a mission of carrying the gospel to the world. Central to that task is the holiness and character of the ones spreading the message. The gospel is not just about no longer being condemned for our sins. As we saw yesterday, it is about being free from the bondage of our sins. It is about being new people in Christ and having our lives be living witnesses to what God can do for us here and now.

**Read** 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we relate this text to the themes of Creation and Redemption and the Sabbath? How can our Sabbath worship help us focus on these themes?

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## Resting in Redemption

Creation, Redemption, and sanctification: we have all these in Christ, and they all are symbolized in a special way through the blessings of the Sabbath.

**In** Matthew 11:28–30 read Jesus’ invitation to rest. How does the Sabbath fit in with what Jesus is telling us here?

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The “rest” Jesus offered to people included emotional, psychological, and spiritual rest for those who were burdened with heavy loads, including the load of sin, guilt, and fear. In addition to the basic human need for physical rest, there is an equally important need for the mind and the spirit to have a change of pace—to rest from the burdens and the stress of daily living. God designed the Sabbath for precisely that. Studies have shown that productivity in the work place actually increases with a weekly break. Bringing closure to the usual routine of life enhances mental acuity and physical endurance. Further, the Sabbath provides the needed sense of anticipation that helps prevent boredom and fatigue.

While anyone can say that they are resting in Christ, the Sabbath gives us a concrete and physical manifestation of that rest. The Sabbath stands as a symbol of the rest that we truly have in Him, in the salvation Christ has wrought for us.

The Sabbath also meets us at the level of our emotional life. It gives us a sense of identity: we are created in the image of God, and we belong to Him because He made us.

And just as God gave the marriage institution in Eden to meet the human need for horizontal intimacy, so He gave the Sabbath for vertical intimacy between the Creator and His creatures.

The Sabbath promises fulfillment—what we may become through Christ’s work of restoration. It gives us hope for the future—the ultimate eternal Sabbath rest. But most important of all, the Sabbath meets us at the highest of all human needs, the need to worship something or Someone. God in His great wisdom has given us the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, a day to spend in honor and praise of Him.

**What burdens are you carrying that you need to have rest from, and how can you learn to give them to Him? How can your Sabbath worship experience help you truly learn to rest in Him?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Literal Week,” pp. 111–116, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God designed that [Sabbath] observance should designate [Israel] as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.

“When the Lord delivered His people Israel from Egypt and committed to them His law, He taught them that by the observance of the Sabbath they were to be distinguished from idolaters. It was this that made the distinction between those who acknowledge the sovereignty of God and those who refuse to accept Him as their Creator and King.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 349.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of how true Sabbath keeping can protect us from many of the delusions regarding Creation. Think, for instance, about the final events regarding those who worship the beast as opposed to those who worship the Creator (see *Revelation 14*). How would a false understanding of our origins—such as the idea that Jesus used evolution to create us—set people up to be deceived in the final days?
- ❷ Go back over the question of Sabbath and worship. How does your church worship on Sabbath? Is the service geared toward exalting God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? If not, what is the emphasis? How can we learn to keep the Lord as the focus of our worship experience?
- ❸ Creation is central to all our beliefs. Why does nothing we believe as Seventh-day Adventists make any sense at all apart from God as the Creator? Creation is foundational to all that we believe, and the Sabbath is imbedded in the original Creation account. How do these facts help reveal just how pivotal and basic the Sabbath is? How does this help us better understand, too, how in the last days, when false powers seek to compel the worship that God alone deserves, the Sabbath will be so central to that final drama?

# I Prayed You Would Come

by ARTUR ARAKELYAN

I am a Global Mission pioneer. I was selling books door-to-door in a city in Armenia. I knocked on one door in an apartment house, and a woman answered. I introduced myself and my work. She welcomed me in and listened as I told her about the books.

She looked up with tears in her eyes and said, “Just before you came to my door, I was praying that God would send someone to help me know more about God and the Bible. I believe God sent you.” The woman, Alvar, said that her 11-year-old daughter had been attending a Protestant church and often told her things she was learning about God. Although Alvar wasn’t attending the church, her daughter’s comments created a hunger to know more.

Then she told how one day three months earlier she had put her two-year-old son to sleep in his stroller near the bedroom window and went about her housework. Her daughter, Anna, was playing outside in the apartment courtyard. The baby awoke and climbed from the stroller onto the windowsill and fell out the window from their ninth-floor apartment. A passerby saw the child falling and screamed. Anna looked up to see her baby brother falling toward her. “Dear Jesus, help me!” she prayed, and instinctively she held out her arms. The baby fell into her arms, and both children tumbled to the ground. Amazingly, neither child was hurt.

As Alvar recalled the story, tears welled in her eyes. “At first I thought that God was punishing me for my sins,” she said. “But when I realized that God had used my daughter’s church to save her brother, then I realized that God was trying to help me. That’s when I began praying to know more about God.”

She couldn’t afford to buy the books she wanted, so I gave her a small book and offered to study the Bible with her. She gladly accepted. She didn’t have a Bible, so I gave her one. She is ready for baptism.

When I first went to this town, we had not even one Seventh-day Adventist there. Now we have a group of 10 people who are meeting in a home every Sabbath and studying the Bible. Another 20 or so are interested to know more but haven’t committed themselves to Bible studies yet. They’re from all walks of life—lawyers, doctors, taxi drivers, and homemakers. I had met them by working as a literature evangelist.

I praise God that our Sabbath School mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission, one way to tell the world that Jesus loves them.

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ARTUR ARAKELYAN is a Global Mission pioneer in Armenia.

# Rejoicing Before *the* Lord: The Sanctuary *and* Worship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Exod. 25:1–9; Exodus 35: 29:38, 39; 25:10–22; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.*

**Memory Text:** “And ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you” (*Deuteronomy 12:12*).

Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote about a friend who, nearing death, explained his own loss of faith. The man said that from his childhood he had prayed, his own act of private devotion and worship before going to sleep. One day, after a hunting trip with his brother, they were getting ready for bed in the same room, and he knelt down to pray. His brother looked at him and said, “You still doing that?” From that moment on, the man never prayed again, never worshiped again, never exercised any faith. The words “You still doing that?” revealed just how empty and meaningless this ritual had been to him all these years, and thus he stopped.

This story illustrates the danger of mere ritual. Worship needs to come from the heart, from the soul, from a true relationship with God. That is why this week we will look at the ancient Israelite sanctuary service, the center of Israelite worship, and derive what lessons we can from it about how we can have a deeper worship experience.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.*

## “That I May Dwell Among Them”

“ ‘You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established’ ”  
*(Exod. 15:17, NKJV).*

This is the first mention in Scripture of a sanctuary. It was sung as part of the song of deliverance by the children of Israel after their escape from Egypt. The verse talks not just about the sanctuary but implies that it will be God’s dwelling on earth. The Hebrew word translated “dwelling” comes from a root that means, literally, “to sit.” Was the Lord really going to dwell, “to sit,” among His people here on earth?

**Read Exodus 25:1–9.** What are the two main points that we learn from the verses, and why are they amazing? (As you think about the answer, think about who God is, His power, His might and majesty.)

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The God who delivered Israel was now going to dwell among them. The same God who was able to perform so many incredible “signs and wonders” (*Deut. 6:22*), the God who created the heavens and the earth, would now live among His people. Talk about the presence of God being near!

On top of that, He was going to live in a building that fallen human beings had made. He, who spoke the world into existence, could have spoken the word and created a magnificent structure. Instead, He had His people intimately and intricately involved in the creation of the place not only for His dwelling but the place that would be the center of all Israelite worship.

The Israelites didn’t make the sanctuary according to human standards but “ ‘according to . . . the pattern, . . . just so you shall make it’ ” (*Exod. 25:9, NKJV*). Every aspect of the earthly tabernacle was to represent a holy God properly and be worthy of His presence.

Everything about it was to inspire a sense of awe and reverence. After all, this was the dwelling place of the Creator of the universe.

**Imagine standing outside a building and knowing that inside that very structure, Yahweh, the Creator God, the Lord of the heavens and earth, was dwelling. What kind of attitude would you have, and why? What should your answer tell you about the attitude you should have during worship?**



## Willing Hearts

As we saw yesterday, not only did the Lord choose to dwell among His people, He did so in a building that they were to make themselves, as opposed to something He created supernaturally. That is, He got them directly involved, an act that ideally would have drawn them closer to Him. Along with that, He didn't miraculously create the material that would be used for the structure.

**Read** Exodus 35. What is happening here, and what important lessons can we take from this for ourselves in regard to the whole question of worship?

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Notice the emphasis on the word *willing*. God said, “whoever is of a willing heart” (*Exod. 35:5, NKJV*), and everyone “whose heart was stirred” (*Exod. 35:21, NKJV*) responded. This means that there was no fire and thunder and loud voice from Sinai commanding them to give these offerings. Instead, here we see the working of the Holy Spirit, who never forces Himself on anyone. Their willingness to give revealed a sense of thanksgiving and gratefulness. After all, look what the Lord had done for them.

Also, notice that the people were not only willing to give to the work of building a sanctuary, but they did so with a spirit of joy and energy. They willingly gave material gifts, their time, their talents, and the work of their creative abilities: “All the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom . . .” (*vs. 26, NKJV*); “everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work” (*Exod. 36:2, NKJV*).

**By** giving as they were, what were the Israelites also doing, even before the sanctuary was made?

We often tend to think of worship as a group of people coming together to sing, pray, and listen to a sermon. And while that is true, worship is not limited to that. What the children of Israel were doing here was worshiping. Every act of self-denial in giving up their own material goods, or their own time, or their own talents for the cause of their Lord was an act of worship.

**Think about your own acts of giving—tithes, offerings, time, talent. How have you experienced what it means to worship through these acts? By giving of yourself, how are you enriched in return?**

## The Continual Burnt Offering

**“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb . . . in the morning, and the other lamb . . . at twilight”** (*Exod. 29:38, 39, NKJV*).

The daily offering of lambs, the “continual burnt offering” (*vs. 42*), was to teach the people their constant need of God and their dependence on Him for forgiveness and acceptance. The fire on the altar was to be kept burning day and night (*Lev. 6:8–13*). This fire could serve as a perpetual reminder of their need of a Savior.

God never intended the daily offering of a lamb to be simply a ritual or routine act. It was to be a time of “intense interest to the worshippers,” a time of preparation for worship, in silent prayer and “with earnest heart searching and confession of sin.” Their faith was to grasp the promises of a Savior to come, the true Lamb of God who would spill His blood for the sins of the whole world (see Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 353).

**How** do the following texts link the death of Christ to animal sacrifices in the Old Testament system? *Heb. 10:1–4; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

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In Hebrews 10:5–10, Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8, showing that Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the sacrificial offerings. He suggests that God had no pleasure in these sacrifices but that they were intended to be a time of sorrow for sin, of repentance, and of turning away from sin. Likewise, the giving of His Son as the ultimate sacrifice would be a time of terrible agony and heartrending sorrow for both the Father and the Son. Paul also emphasized that true worship must always flow from a forgiven, cleansed, and sanctified heart that delights in obeying the One who has made it all possible. “Therefore, I urge you brethren, . . . to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (*Rom. 12:1, NASB*).

Worship means, first and foremost, giving ourselves wholly and completely to God as a living sacrifice. When we give ourselves first, then our gifts, our praise, and our hearts will follow. This attitude is a sure protection against meaningless and empty rituals.

**Ask yourself these questions: Have I given everything over to Christ, who died for my sins? Or is there some corner of my heart or life that I refuse to let go of? If so, what is it, and how can I be willing to give it up?**

## Communion With God

One of the key aspects of being a Christian, of having a saving relationship with Christ, is that of knowing the Lord. Jesus Himself said, “ ‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ ” (*John 17:3*). As in any kind of relationship, communication is the key.

**Read** Exodus 25:10–22. What are the people being told to make, and what promises are they given?

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Above the sacred ark, which contained God’s holy law, and enshrined on the mercy seat dwelt the very presence of God in the Shekinah glory. There, “mercy and truth [were] met together; righteousness and peace . . . kissed each other” (*Ps. 85:10*). There, from the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the smoke ascended, representing the prayers of God’s people mingled with the merits and intercession of Christ.

Amid all this is the promise: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (*Exod. 25:22*).

God promised the people not just His presence; He promised to communicate with His people, to talk to them, to guide them in the ways that they should go.

**What** do these texts promise us? *Pss. 37:23, 48:14, Prov. 3:6, John 16:13.*

Today, of course, we do not have an earthly sanctuary, but we do have the promises of God’s guidance and presence in our lives if we surrender to Him. What believer has not seen the leading of the Lord at some point in his or her life?

Here, too, is where worship comes in. We must worship the Lord in an attitude of submission, of surrender, of willingness to be led. A heart yielded to the Lord in prayer, submission, reverence, and surrender, a heart sensing its own need of salvation, of grace, of repentance, is a heart that—full of worshipful praise to God—will be guided in the way that the Lord would desire. In the end, true worship should help you be more open to God’s leading because it should help you learn an attitude of faith and submission. There is nothing empty in this kind of worship.

## Rejoicing Before the Lord

A substantial part of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers centers on the sanctuary service—its construction, its services, the sacrifices and offerings presented there, and the ministration of the priests. It was a very sacred and holy place. After all, it was not only the place where God Himself dwelt, it was the place where Israel came to be forgiven and cleansed of sin. It was the place where Israel learned and experienced the gospel.

At the same time, we must not come away with the idea that Israelite worship was cold, sterile, and formal. The Lord had set very strict guidelines on what was to be done, but these guidelines were not ends in themselves. Rather, they were means to an end, and the end was that His people would be a holy, joyful, and faithful covenant nation that would teach the world about the true God (*Exod. 19:6, Deut. 4:5–7, Zech. 8:23*).

### **What** do these texts tell us about Israelite worship at the sanctuary?

*Lev. 23:39–44; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.*

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One of the great struggles facing the church in our time today has to do with worship and worship styles. On one end, church services can be cold, formal, stale, and definitely without joy. The other danger is that emotions become the dominant factor: all people want to do is have a good time, “rejoicing” in the Lord at the expense of any kind of strict adherence to biblical truths.

An important point to remember, a lesson that we can learn from the sanctuary model, is that all true worship, which should lead to rejoicing, must do so in the context of biblical truth. God gave the Israelites very clear, strict, and formal instructions regarding the construction of the sanctuary and its ministry and services, all of which were meant to teach them the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment. And yet, at the same time, they were to rejoice before the Lord in their worship. This theme appears again and again. It should be clear, then, that one can be very strong in biblical teaching and at the same time have a joyous worship experience. After all, if the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment are not worth rejoicing over, what is?

**What is your own experience in rejoicing before the Lord? What does this mean to you? How can you have a more joyful worship experience? How can you make sure your worship experience is not similar to the man in this week’s introduction that Tolstoy told about?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 343–358; “The Sin of Nadab and Abihu,” pp. 359–362; “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 367–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Lord’s Vineyard,” pp. 288–290, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Ellen G. White Comments,” in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1139, 1140.

From the Holy Shekinah, “God made known His will. Divine messages were sometimes communicated to the high priest by a voice from the cloud. Sometimes a light fell upon the angel at the right, to signify approval or acceptance, or a shadow or cloud rested upon the one at the left to reveal disapproval or rejection.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

“In them [His people] the Lord designed to dwell in His fulness in this world; not only in a general way by dwelling in a tent; but by so completely taking possession of their lives, as to show them, and through them the world, how the Messiah would be the dwelling-place of God.”—F. C. Gilbert, *Practical Lessons From the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today* (Concord, Mass.: Good Tidings Press, 1902), p. 351.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can you help others see that the giving of tithes and offerings is truly an act of worship? What are we compromising when we do not tithe and do not give offerings?
- 2 Look at your own church services. Do they lean more toward the cold, formal, sterile, and joyless? Or do they lean more toward the emotional, toward excitement, and feeling? Or is there a good balance between the extremes? Discuss.
- 3 In an attempt to reach out to the nonchurched, some congregations radically have altered their worship services. While this could be a very good thing, what dangers should they be aware of, such as that of compromise and of watering down crucial biblical truths?
- 4 In some worship services, rituals have been performed a certain way for many years, and that is the reason given for not wanting to make any changes. How would you respond to the answer, “This is how we have always done it” when change is suggested and rejected?
- 5 The earthly sanctuary was a very sacred and holy place, the place where God Himself dwelt. At the same time, the children of Israel were to rejoice before the Lord there. What lessons can we draw from these important truths about worship?

## Reluctant Witness

Galina and Nadia have been friends since their childhood in a small city in Bulgaria. Galina sometimes attended the Seventh-day Adventist Church with her grandmother and later with her mother. When she was 17 she was baptized. But she wasn't sure how to explain her faith to her friend Nadia.

Then one day Nadia invited Galina to her birthday party in a nearby disco. Galina convinced herself that by going she was showing respect to her friend. At first the music was soft, and the young people chatted. Then the dancing began. While everyone else danced, Galina remained at the table.

A boy sitting at the table noticed Galina and asked, "Why aren't you dancing? Don't you know how?" Galina told him that she could dance, but she chose not to dance socially. She mentioned God in her explanation.

The boy started asking Galina questions about her faith. People came and went from the table, but Galina and her new friend kept talking. At 1:00 A.M., the young people were asked to leave because the disco was closing. The last of the young people lived in an apartment block near the club, so they walked home together.

Galina and her new friend continued talking as they walked home. The others noticed and listened. The 30-minute walk home took more than an hour. As they approached their apartments, they sat down and continued talking about God, His love, His expectations, and their response to God. They talked for three more hours. Finally, they arranged to meet another day and continue the conversation.

A few days later, the group met at Nadia's apartment. Galina took her boyfriend to help her answer questions. The other four young people were burning with questions. Galina and her boyfriend gave them some books to read. Nadia and her brother, Stoyen, continued asking questions, and eventually they visited the church.

Stoyen was the first to show serious interest in God, and a few months later he was baptized. His parents opposed his new faith, for they had been communists. Nadia took more time to make a decision for Christ, but she eventually was baptized as well.

Today Stoyen and Nadia are active in church. And Galina has learned an important lesson. "We must not be ashamed to share our faith," she says. "My best friend and her brother are Christians today because I reluctantly shared my faith."

Our mission offerings help train young people and adults alike to share their faith with others. Thank you!

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*GALINA PIRINDJIEVA lives in Yambol, Bulgaria.*

# Happy Are You, O Israel!



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Leviticus 9; 10:1–11; Rev. 20:9; Deut. 33:26–29; 1 Samuel 1; 15:22, 23.*

**Memory Text:** “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (*Isaiah 5:20, 21, NKJV*).

In cultures focused on individuality, it is so easy to forget what must always be the starting point of all worship: the action of God in history. Authentic worship should be the Christian's heartfelt response to God's mighty acts, both in Creation and in Redemption (again, the first angel's message motif). True worship comes from our response to God's love and should impact every area of our lives. In the end, authentic worship is not just what we do on Sabbath; it should permeate all areas of our lives and not just in church.

Especially in our desire to be relevant, it is so easy to shift the focus of worship solely onto ourselves, our needs, our desires, and our wants. And though worship should be personally satisfying, the danger comes from how we seek to experience that satisfaction. Only in the Lord, only in the One who created and redeemed us, can we find true satisfaction, as much as is possible in a sinful, fallen world.

This week we will look further at some of the lessons about true worship that we can learn from Israel's history, both from the good things that happened and from the bad.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.*

## The Dedication

Seven days of consecration had passed (*see Leviticus 8*). On the eighth day the priests entered their sacred ministry in the sanctuary. They were starting a work that would continue (though not without interruption) for more than fourteen hundred years, a work that prefigured the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the true sanctuary where Christ now ministers on our behalf.

**Read** Leviticus 9. What elements appear here that teach us about worship? That is, what truths are taught by the various rituals that help us understand the work of God for humanity and why we worship Him? For example, what does the work of “atonement” teach us about what God has done for us and why we worship Him?

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Verses 22–24 are especially fascinating. It is hard to imagine what must have gone on in the minds and hearts of Moses and Aaron as they entered the sanctuary and then came out, only to have “the glory of the Lord” appear before all the people. Though the text does not say what exactly happened, there were a lot of people in the camp at that time, and for all of them to have seen it means that it must have been something spectacular. Perhaps the glory was manifested by what happened next: “and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces” (*Lev. 9:24, NKJV*).

The tabernacle had been dedicated and the priests consecrated to the service of divine worship. Holy fire appeared as a token that the sacrifice had been accepted. The people responded in unison—with a shout of praise, and then fell on their faces in humility before the glory of God’s holy presence. What we see here is intense reverence, awe, and obedience; every detail of God’s commands were followed, and the Lord showed His acceptance of what they had done.

**Notice their reaction: they shouted and also fell on their faces. However intense the whole service was, their reaction was one of reverence, joy, and fear—all at the same time. How can we learn to manifest this kind of reverence and joy in our own worship services?**



## Fire From Before the Lord

“Assisted by his sons, Aaron offered the sacrifices that God required, and he lifted up his hands and blessed the people. All had been done as God commanded, and He accepted the sacrifice, and revealed His glory in a remarkable manner; fire came from the Lord and consumed the offering upon the altar. The people looked upon this wonderful manifestation of divine power with awe and intense interest. They saw in it a token of God’s glory and favor, and they raised a universal shout of praise and adoration and fell on their faces as if in the immediate presence of Jehovah.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 359. It is hard to believe that after something so dramatic, a terrible fall would immediately follow. One would have thought that with such a demonstration of God’s power, all the people, particularly the priests (especially priests as highly honored as these), would have fallen strictly in line. How foolish we are to ever underestimate the corruption of the human heart, especially our own!

**Read** the story of Nadab and Abihu in **Leviticus 10:1–11**. **Who were they? What was their sin? Compare Exod. 30:9, Lev. 16:12, 10:9. After what just happened in the previous chapter, what significance is found in how they died? What important gospel lesson can we learn from this tragic story?**

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The Hebrew wording in both Leviticus 9:24 and 10:2 was the same: “and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed” (9:24, *NKJV*). Consumed what? In the first case, the offering; in the other, the sinners. What a powerful representation of the plan of salvation. At the Cross, the “fire from God,” the wrath of God, “consumed” the offering, and that was Jesus. Thus, all who put their faith in Him never have to face that fire, that wrath, because a substitute did it for them. Those, however, like these priests, who reject God’s way for their own, will have to face that fire themselves (*Rev. 20:9*). The same glory that was revealed at the Cross will be the glory that, in the end, destroys sin. What a stark and unambiguous choice is before us all.

**In one sense, if you think about it, fire is fire. What is the difference? Obviously, in this case, it was a big one. Think about not just how you worship but your life in general. What, if any, “strange fires” might you need to put out in your life?**

## Happy Are You, O Israel

Picture the scene: the faithful servant Moses, rebuked by the Lord for his outburst of anger, stands before the nation of Israel (*Num. 20:8–12*).

Later on, Moses knows that he is soon to die. How easily he could have wallowed in self-pity and frustration. Even then, however, his thoughts were for his people and for the future they were to face. Standing before the people as their leader for the last time, Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pronounced a blessing on each tribe. He then ended with a benediction.

**Read** Deuteronomy 33:26–29. What is Moses saying here that can help us better understand what it means to worship the Lord? What truths, what principles, can we apply as we seek to learn more about what true worship is?

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The word *Yeshurun* is a poetic term for Israel (*see Deut. 33:5, 26*). It comes from a root word (*yashar*) meaning “upright” or “straight,” not merely physically but also morally. Job was described (*Job 1:1*) as “perfect and upright” (*from yashar*); see also Psalms 32:11, 97:11, and Proverbs 15:8. Hence, Moses is talking about what God’s people ideally should be like, those who have entered into a covenant relationship with Him.

As always, the key focus here is upon God’s acts on behalf of His people. All of the things that will happen to Israel—victory over enemies, safety, salvation, the fruit of the land—is theirs because of what the Lord has done for them. How crucial that they never forget these important truths. Among many of the things that worship can do for us is that it can be a constant reminder of what “the God of Jeshurun” has done for us. Praise, worship, and adoration—whether coming verbally from our lips or expressed in the thoughts of the heart and mind—can go a long way in helping us keep focused on God and not on ourselves and our problems.

**Think about all that you have to praise and worship the Lord for. Why is it so important to keep all these blessings, all that He has done on your behalf, before you at all times? Otherwise, how easy is it to fall into discouragement?**

## An Attitude of Surrender

Worship, in the Bible, is serious business. It is not a matter of personal taste, nor is it a matter of doing one's own thing or following one's own proclivities. There is always the danger of falling into dead rituals and traditions that become ends in themselves instead of the means to an end—and that end is true worship of the Lord in a way that changes our lives and brings us into conformity with His will and character (*Gal. 4:19*). We must be careful not to allow self-exaltation, sinful gratification, and a desire for personal glory to dictate how we worship.

We now jump ahead a number of years in Israelite history and read a simple story that can help reveal to us how true worship can be expressed in the heart of a penitent soul.

**Read 1 Samuel 1, the story of Hannah. What can we take from her experience that helps us understand the meaning of worship and how we are to worship the Lord?**

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However much we must remember that God Himself should be the focus of our worship, we do not worship God in a vacuum. We are not worshipping a distant, far off, abstract being; we are worshipping the God who created and redeemed us and who interacts in human affairs. We are worshipping a personal God who intervenes in our lives in the most intimate ways, ways that will help us with our deepest needs if we allow Him to.

Hannah worshiped the Lord from the most hollow recesses of her soul. In a sense, we are all like Hannah. We all have heartfelt and deep needs that, in and of ourselves, we cannot meet. Hannah came before the Lord in an attitude of complete self-surrender. (After all, how much more self-surrender could one find than to be willing to give up your child?) We can, and should, come before God with our needs; but we always must make those needs subordinate to the Lord's calling in our lives. True worship should flow from a broken heart totally aware of its own helplessness and dependence upon God.

**What are the broken places inside you? How can you learn to give them to the Lord?**

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## Worship and Obedience

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam. 15:22, 23).

**Read** the above passage. What crucial principle can we take away from it concerning what constitutes true worship? What does it warn us against? How can we make sure we are not guilty of exactly what these verses warn about?

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Those verses unfold in the context of the continued downfall and apostasy of Saul, Israel’s first king. Saul was to attack and utterly destroy (the Hebrew word suggests “dedicated to destruction”) every person, every animal. God planned to use Israel to bring judgment on this wicked nation, the Amalekites, that in mercy He had delayed for some three centuries. Despite explicit instruction about what to do, Saul openly disobeyed (1 Sam. 15:1–21), and now he was going to reap the consequences of his actions. Samuel’s answer to Saul in verses 22 and 23 helps us better understand what real worship should be about.

1. God would rather have our hearts than our offerings. (If He truly has our hearts, the offerings will follow.)
2. Obedience is more pleasing to Him than are sacrifices. (Obedience is our way of showing that we understand what the sacrifices are truly about.)
3. Stubbornness, insisting on our own way, is idolatry because we have made a god of ourselves, our desires, and our opinions.

**Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart as you ask yourself the following: In what areas in my life may I be choosing to follow my own desires and opinions rather than letting God lead me? What applications can I make to my worship experience from the example of Saul in his fatal presumptions?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Sin of Nadab and Abihu,” pp. 359–362; “The Presumption of Saul,” pp. 616–626, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God has pronounced a curse upon those who depart from His commandments, and put no difference between common and holy things.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 360.

“[Saul’s] fatal presumption must be attributed to satanic sorcery. Saul had manifested great zeal in suppressing idolatry and witchcraft; yet in his disobedience to the divine command he had been actuated by the same spirit of opposition to God and had been as really inspired by Satan as are those who practice sorcery; and when reproved, he had added stubbornness to rebellion. He could have offered no greater insult to the Spirit of God had he openly united with idolaters.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 635.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it so important in worship to truly keep Christ as the center? However subtle, what other things can come in and take our focus off the Lord as we worship? In what ways might we be in danger of using the Lord, or the name of the Lord in praise and song, as merely a cover for the worship of something else?
- ❷ What are ways that we can be hypocritical in worship? That is, what does it say about us if, when outside of church itself we act one way and then inside church we are full of praise and adoration and worship? Though none of us is perfect, shouldn’t the lives we lead be connected with the kind of worship we practice? Sadly, some people go to church, “worship,” and then go home and abuse their spouses and children or engage in other evil behavior. How do such practices make a mockery of our worship?
- ❸ Go back over the memory verse for this week and apply it in the context of worship. How can we be sure that we are not doing exactly what we are being warned against here?
- ❹ How can you better learn the art of worship, the art of self-surrender to the Lord? How can you learn to draw closer to the Lord in your own private time of worship?

# Teaching the Teacher

by JACQUELINE THERMIL

Dieuseul Placid was one of my teachers in secondary school. After I graduated, I studied theology at Haiti Adventist University. Later, when I returned to my home, a church elder asked me to visit my former teacher. “He’s interested in the Adventist faith,” the elder said. I visited my teacher and heard his interesting story.

“My friends and I sometimes talk about voodoo,” Dieuseul told me. “I don’t practice voodoo, but I wanted to know about it. One day my friend told me that he could kill anyone through evil spirits.

“Another man disagreed and told us that a good Christian—especially a good Seventh-day Adventist—is immune to the evil spirits. I asked my friend what’s so special about Adventists that they are immune to the devil’s power. My friend explained that Adventists follow the Bible and teach God’s straight truths. They are powerful in prayer and can even cast out spirits from people who are possessed. I wondered about the secret that made these Adventists resistant to the devil’s power.”

After Dieuseul related his conversation to me, he asked me to study the Bible with him. I gladly agreed. He warned me that he was studying with several other denominations to see which one was the right church. I was glad, for I knew he was searching for truth.

After a few Bible studies, Dieuseul asked me to meet the others with whom he was studying so we could talk about doctrine. I agreed. When we met, Dieuseul asked to talk about the law and how it reflects God’s character and His love. But the other believers refused to discuss the law of God for various reasons. They wanted to talk about grace instead. But Dieuseul insisted, and before long the others closed their books and left.

We continued studying, and in a short time Dieuseul became convinced of the Bible’s clear and plain truths and asked to become a member of the Adventist Church. He was baptized and today is an elder in his church. The devil lost the argument, and today Dieuseul truly is God’s unique son.

I thank God for honest-hearted souls, such as my former teacher, who are willing to recognize God’s voice and follow His leading. I thank God, too, for your mission offerings, which help build up the church in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world.



JACQUELINE THERMIL (left) pastors four churches in Haiti.

# Worship *and* Song *and* Praise



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 32:1–5; 1 Chron. 51:1–6, 17; 1 Chron. 16:8–36; Rev. 4:9–11; 5:9–13; Phil. 4:8.*

**Memory Text:** “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (*Psalms 96:1*).

**K**ing David's life is recorded in the Bible for many reasons: not only does an important part of Israelite history center on his life and reign, but we can learn many spiritual lessons from him, both from his good deeds and his bad.

This week we will start out using some examples from David and his life in order to delve more into the question of worship: what it means, how we should do it, and what it should do for us. For in David we can see many examples of worship and song and praise. These things were a crucial part of his life and of his experience with the Lord.

Thus, it must be with us, as well, especially if we constantly remember that the first angel's message is a call to worship. What does it mean “to worship”? How do we do it? Why do we do it? What role does music play in worship? What distinguishes true worship from false worship?

These all are themes that we will touch on in various ways this quarter as we heed the call: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (*Ps. 95:6, 7*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.*

## Between Saul and David

**Read** the following glimpses into David’s life before he became king: 1 Samuel 16:6–13, 17:45–47, 18:14, 24:10, 26:9, 30:6–8. What does this tell us about David?

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God chose Saul as the first king of Israel because he matched the description the people had requested. But when God chose David to be the next king of Israel, He reminded Samuel that the Lord looks on the heart (*1 Sam. 16:7*).

David was far from being perfect. In fact, some would argue that David’s later moral lapses were much more serious than Saul’s sins. Yet, the Lord rejected Saul but forgave even David’s worst mistakes, allowing him to continue being king. What made the difference?

**See** Psalms 32:1–5, 51:1–6. What crucial concept is found in these texts that is so central to faith?

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God is in the heart business. He not only reads the heart—the center of thought, inner attitudes, and motives—but He can touch and change hearts that are open to Him. David’s heart yielded to the conviction of sin. He repented, and he patiently accepted the consequences of his sins. In contrast, whatever outward confessions Saul made, it was clear that his heart was not surrendered to the Lord. “Yet the Lord, having placed on Saul the responsibility of the kingdom, did not leave him to himself. He caused the Holy Spirit to rest upon Saul to reveal to him his own weakness and his need of divine grace; and had Saul relied upon God, God would have been with him. So long as his will was controlled by the will of God, so long as he yielded to the discipline of His Spirit, God could crown his efforts with success. But when Saul chose to act independently of God, the Lord could no longer be his guide, and was forced to set him aside.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 636.

**Ask yourself, how does what goes on inside your heart differ from what people see of you on the outside? What does your answer say to you about yourself?**

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## A Broken Heart, a Broken Spirit

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (*Ps. 51:17, NKJV*). Think about these words of David, but in the context of worship. (After all, in ancient Israel, worship centered around the sacrifice.) Realize, too, that the word translated “contrite” comes from a Hebrew word that means “crushed.” What is the Lord saying to us here? How are we to understand this idea along with the idea that there should be joy in our worship? Why are these two contrasting concepts not necessarily contradictory?

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As Christians, we take it as a given (or at least we should) that all of humanity is fallen, sinful, degraded. This degradation and sinfulness includes each one of us, individually. Think of the contrast between what you know you could be and what you are; the contrast between the kind of thoughts you think and the kind you know that you should think; the contrast between what you do and what you should do, between what you do not do and what you know that you should. As Christians, with the biblical standard of Jesus before us, the personal realization of our true nature can be especially devastating. This is where our broken spirit and crushed and broken hearts come from. If those professing to be Christians do not see this, they are truly blind; most likely they have not had a conversion experience or have lost it.

Yet, the joy comes from knowing that, despite our fallen state, God loves us so much that Christ came and died, offering Himself for us, and that His perfect life, His perfect holiness, His perfect character, becomes credited to us by faith. Again, the theme of the “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*) appears. Our worship should center not just on our own sinfulness but on God’s amazing solution to it: the Cross. Of course, we need that broken and crushed heart, but we always need to frame that sad reality against the background of what God has done for us in Christ. In fact, the realization of how bad we are leads to joy, because we know that, despite our state, we can have eternal life anyway, and that because of Jesus, God will not count our transgressions against us. This is a truth that must always be at the center of all worship experiences, whether corporate or private.

## David: A Song of Praise and Worship

David's understanding of God and the salvation He offered shaped not only his own life but his spiritual leadership and influence over his people. His songs and prayers reflect a deep sense of awe for the God he loved and knew as a personal friend and Savior.

According to 1 Chronicles 16:7, David presented to Asaph, his chief musician, a new song of thanksgiving and praise on the day that the ark was moved to Jerusalem. This praise psalm consists of two important aspects of worship: the revelation of God as One worthy of worship and the appropriate response of the worshiper. In this song, David first calls worshipers to active participation in worship.

Read the entire song in 1 Chronicles 16:8–36. Notice how often the following action words and expressions are used, especially in the first part of the song: *give thanks, sing, call on His name, seek the Lord, make known, talk of, declare, give glory to, proclaim, remember, and bring an offering*. David then recited some of the reasons why God is worthy of our praise and worship.

**What** were some of the events of the past that the people of Israel were to make known to others? *1 Chron. 16:8, 12, 16–22*. What special acts of God were they to remember? *Vss. 12, 15*.

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**The** psalmist's rehearsal of the covenant takes up nearly a third of this thanksgiving hymn. In what way does the covenant relate to worship?

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The covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was based on His ability, as their Ruler, to make them a great nation, to bless them, and to bring them into the Promised Land. Their part was to love, obey, and worship Him as their Father and God. However different our context today may be, the same principle still holds.

**Meditate on the ways David calls us to worship God. In our own time, place, and context, how can these same ideas be reflected in our corporate worship of the Lord?**

## David's Song

**“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”** (*Job 38:7*).

Second Samuel 22 records a song that David wrote in praise of the Lord. (Skim through the song and note the key elements and how they are linked to worship.) The key point here, and in so many other places in the Bible, is that this was a song. It was music. All through Scripture, we find music as an integral part of worship. According to the text above, the angels sang in response to the creation of the world.

**Read Revelation 4:9–11, 5:9–13, 7:10–12, 14:1–3. What does this tell us about some things that go on in the sinless environment of heaven? What are some of the themes expressed here, and what can we learn from them about worship?**

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Central to the theme of the songs and praise and adoration is Jesus as Creator and as Redeemer. If they sing about that in heaven, how much more so should we be doing that here on earth?

There is no question that song and music and praise are part of our worship experience. As creatures made in God's image, we share a love and an appreciation for music, as do other intelligent beings. It is hard to imagine a culture that does not use music in some way or another, for some purpose or another. Love and appreciation of music are woven into the very fabric of our human existence; God surely made us that way.

Music has the power to touch us and move us that other forms of communication do not seem to have. At its purest and finest, music seems to lift us into the very presence of the Lord. Who has not experienced, at some point, the power of music to bring us closer to our Maker?

**What has been your own spiritual experience with the power of music? What kind of music do you listen to, and how does it impact your relationship with the Lord?**

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## “Sing a New Song to the Lord!”

Unfortunately, though we have access to some of the themes and lyrics of divinely inspired songs, we do not have any of the music itself. Thus, using our God-given gifts (at least, those of us who have those gifts), we write our own music if not always our own lyrics. But as we all know, we do not do this in a vacuum. We worship in relationship to the culture we live in, a culture that to some degree influences us and our music. This can be a good thing, or this can be a bad thing. The hard thing is to know the difference.

**Read** the following texts. How can they give us principles that should guide us in the kind of music we have in our worship? *1 Cor. 10:31, Phil. 4:8, Col. 1:18.*

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Over the years, the question of music and types of music in worship has arisen in our church. In some cases, hymnal music has been given all but sacred status; in others, it is hard to tell the difference between what is being played in church and what is being played as secular music.

What is important for worship music is that it point us to the noblest and the best, which is the Lord. It should appeal, not to the baser elements of our being but to the higher ones. Music is not morally neutral: it can move us to some of the most exalted spiritual experiences, or it can be used by the enemy to debase and degrade us, to bring out lusts and passion and despair and anger. All one has to do is look at what some of the music industry today produces to see powerful examples of how Satan has perverted another of God’s wonderful gifts to humanity.

Music in our worship services should have a balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements. The lyrics, in harmony with the music itself, should uplift us, elevate our thoughts, and make us long more for the Lord who has done so much for us. Music that can bring us to the foot of the cross, that can help us realize what we have been given in Christ, is the kind we need for our worship.

Again, various cultures have different tastes in music, and music and musical instruments vary in our worldwide family. What is uplifting and encouraging to those in one culture might sound strange to those in another. Either way, how important it is that we seek the Lord’s guidance in having appropriate music for our worship services.

**Further Study:** “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

Music “is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . .

“As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . .

“As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what ways do your culture and society impact the music in your church, or do you deny that it does?
- ❷ Read the Ellen White quote in Friday’s study about music. How much of this do you experience with the kind of music that is part of your church’s worship service? What are ways that we can evaluate the role of music in our church services? How can your church members work together to make sure that the music is, indeed, uplifting and encouraging, fulfilling the role that it should?

# Stubborn Faith

by JOANNE LAFEVER

“What? You’re not going to attend the study session on Friday night!” Wa Wa’s English teacher, Mr. Peter, almost shouted at her. Wa Wa studied hard throughout high school, and ranked near the top of her class. But she loved God more than grades, and she had great faith that He would help her pass her tests so she could study at a good university.

The pressure to score well on tests mounted as Wa Wa entered her last year of high school. Teachers offered extra study sessions to help their best students score even higher. High test scores brought prestige to the schools and increased students’ chances to enter their choice of universities. Mr. Peter noticed when Wa Wa didn’t attend study sessions on Friday evenings or Saturdays. He encouraged her, pleaded with her, and even scolded her in an attempt to get her to attend the sessions. But she refused.

“No, on Sabbath, from sundown Friday till sundown on Saturday, I worship my God,” she told her teacher. Wa Wa was positive that God would help her do well on her tests if she was faithful to Him.

Eventually, Mr. Peter realized that he couldn’t change her mind. He respected her determination, though he didn’t understand her religion.

When Wa Wa’s classmates learned of her refusal, they were shocked. But they, too, saw Wa Wa’s determination and accepted her decision to skip study sessions.

When the students’ test scores arrived, Wa Wa had scored in the top 10 percent of her class, even without the additional study sessions. Her teachers were shocked. Her classmates were shocked. “You haven’t studied nearly enough to do this well!” some said.

But Wa Wa wasn’t shocked. “I trust in God,” she told them. “He is a powerful God. I knew that He would help me.”

Wa Wa was accepted at a good university near her home in Taipei, Taiwan. She testifies to her classmates and teachers that God is leading in her life. And she continues to keep the Sabbath and worship God rather than attend classes and study sessions on His holy day.

One in every 4,300 people in Taiwan is a Seventh-day Adventist. Among the ethnic Chinese, only 1 in every 25,000 is an Adventist. Our mission offerings help spread the message of God’s love through the Adventist hospital, Adventist schools, health programs, and local evangelistic outreach in this nation.

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*JOANNE LAFEVER is director of education for the Guam-Micronesia Mission. Formerly she was principal of Taipei Adventist American School. Wa Wa Wang is a college student in Taipei, Taiwan.*



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# Worship *in the* Psalms



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Psalms 90:1, 2; 100:1–5; 73; 49; 141:2; 20:3; 54:6; 78:1–8.*

**Memory Text:** “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (*Psalms 84:1, 2, NIV*).

The Hebrew word translated “Psalms” comes from a root word that means “to sing with instrumental accompaniment.” Thus, the Psalms were songs, songs that were intricately part of the worship of Israel. Though we have the lyrics (the Psalms themselves), we do not have the music. How fascinating it would be to hear these songs, in their original tongue, sung with the music that first accompanied them.

The Psalms themselves are rich and deep, covering a wide range of topics and emotions, dealing with everything from the corporate history of Israel to the songwriter’s most intimate and personal pain. In that sense, they speak to us because, though as a church we are part of the long history that goes back to Israel, we also are individuals with our own private pain. It is doubtful that any of us could not relate at some time or another to some of the agony expressed in the Psalms. At the same time, though, it is crucial that we reach out and grasp the hope expressed in them.

This week we will look at the Psalms and some of the themes found in them and how these themes relate to the question of worship and what it means for us today.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.*

## Worship the Lord, Our Maker

The psalms of praise describe who God is and why He is worthy of worship. They declare His greatness, and call worshipers to come with joyful adoration to honor Him.

**What** do the following examples have in common? *Pss. 90:1, 2; 95:1–6; 100:1–5.*

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**Psalm 19** is another song in praise of God as Creator. What is its essential message, and why is that especially important for us today, at a time when many argue that we exist only as the result of natural and unguided forces that created us by chance alone?

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**Notice** how the psalmist suddenly shifts from discussing God's glory revealed in the heavens to His revealed word. This abrupt transition is intentional. *Read John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:1–3.* What great truth is the psalmist emphasizing?

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The same God who spoke the world into existence also gave the moral, physical, and social laws to govern the human family. The Old Testament Scriptures clearly identify God as both the Creator of the world and the Giver of the Written Law. The New Testament writers see Jesus Christ as the Creator and the Giver of the Law as well as the Word made flesh, who lived among His creatures in order to reveal the Father to them and to die as their Substitute. Thus, He alone is worthy of adoration and worship.

Hence, we see in the Psalms one of the foundational principles of worship as seen in the first angel's message (*Rev. 14:7*). We worship the Lord because He is our Creator, and directly tied to His role as Creator is His role as our Redeemer (*Rev. 14:6*). Creator and Redeemer—if these are not reasons to praise and worship Him, what are?

**How can you seek to get to know the Lord better through His created works?**

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## Judgment From His Sanctuary

While many psalms were written for public worship, many others are prayers of personal distress and suffering. These laments typically contain a description of the problem, the sufferer's plea for help, and an affirmation of, and reasons for, the writer's trust in God.

In Psalm 73, the petitioner is angry that the wicked prosper and are at ease while he suffers injustice.

**Read** the psalmist's complaint in Psalm 73. What happened that brought about a change in his attitude toward the problem? What message can we take from that for ourselves, as Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the truths about God and the plan of salvation that this ministry reveals? See *Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 25, 26*.

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Judgment in the Psalms, as in the Bible as a whole, is a double-edged sword: deserved punishment on the wicked and the defense of the oppressed and humble (*Pss. 7:9, 10; 9:7–12; 75:2; 94:1–3, 20–22; 98:9*). In Psalm 68:24, the wicked are pictured as watching God enter the sanctuary in a grand processional. God's throne, representing justice and mercy, is symbolized in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. Thus, the sanctuary, the place of worship, becomes a haven of refuge for the distressed.

Here, too, we see the theme of judgment echoed in the first angel's message: "Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come . . ." (*Rev. 14:7*). One of the things about God, about what makes Him so worthy of our worship, is that we can indeed trust that in the end, not only will judgment come but it will be just and righteous, nothing like the fallible and imperfect justice meted out even in the best human courts. From the death of Abel, whose blood cried out from the ground (*Gen. 4:10*), up through today and on to the last day of fallen human history, the crimes, the unfairness, and the inequities of this world do indeed cry out for justice. The good news is that we can trust that, in His time and way, God will make all things right, however hard it is for us to see and understand now (*see 1 Cor. 4:5*).

**Have you seen injustice? Have you been the victim of injustice? What are ways that you can learn to trust in God, to trust in the promise of ultimate and righteous justice that is so lacking in the world now?**

## “Like the Beasts That Perish”

As we saw yesterday, and as we all know too well, so much unfairness and injustice reign in this world. A relatively small percentage of people live in luxury, in contrast to vast multitudes who struggle to barely eke out an existence. The gap between the rich and poor seems steadily to grow; and what makes it worse is that so often the rich get richer by exploiting the poor. All through the Bible, the Lord has warned about this exploitation and injustice. Those who are guilty of such exploitation, and who do not repent and turn away, will have a lot to answer for on Judgment Day.

**Read** Psalm 49. How does it tie in with what we read yesterday? What is the basic message of this psalm? Where do we find the gospel here? What ultimate and final hope is presented?

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It is so easy to get caught up in the things of this world, especially if you have many things in this world as do the rich. Yet, as the psalm says, and as we all should know by now, the things of this world are so fleeting, so temporary, so easily lost. Overnight, everything you have worked for, everything you have struggled to attain, everything that is important to you, can be taken away, lost, destroyed. We all live on the edge of a precipice, at least in this life. Fortunately, as this psalm shows, and as so much of the rest of the Bible attests, this life is not all that there is.

**Focus** on verses 7–9 of this psalm. Given the immediate context, what is it saying? How does it show how all of us, rich or poor, are ultimately dependent upon Christ for salvation?

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Do you ever find yourself jealous of those who have more than you do? If so, why is it so important to surrender those feelings to the Lord? How do such emotions interfere with your spiritual life, with your relationship to God, and your faith in general? How can focusing on Jesus, the Cross, and salvation help free you from the tyranny of jealousy?

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## Worship and the Sanctuary

**“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps. 141:2). What imagery is being used here? What is this verse pointing to?**

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The entire Old Testament sanctuary service centered on the concept of sacrifice. However much the enemy of souls perverted it, even to the point where people were sacrificing their own children in order (they believed) to appease an angry god (or gods), the sacrificial system was intended to point to the death of Jesus on behalf of all humanity. It was to show the futility of our own works to save us; it was to show that the cost of sin was the life of an innocent victim; it was to show that the Lord had a plan whereby sinners could be forgiven, cleansed, and accepted by the Lord through His grace.

It is no wonder, then, that many of the psalms, so central to Israel’s worship, would use images and examples from the sanctuary service. See *Pss. 20:3, 43:4, 51:19, 54:6, 118:27, 134:2, 141:2.*

Dwell on the sanctuary service: the sacrifice of the animals, the ministry of the priests, the furniture in the courtyard, and the Holy and Most Holy Places. What sacred truths can we draw from this earthly and temporary system about the work of Jesus on our behalf? Why should these truths be so central to our worship of the Lord?

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**Read Psalm 40:6–8 and Hebrews 10:1–13. How does Paul connect Psalm 40:8 with the sacrificial system?**

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The author’s point is that it is through Christ, not through the death of animals, that we have salvation. Only through Christ is there true forgiveness of sin. The whole earthly system was merely a precursor to what Jesus would do on behalf of all humanity. He was telling his audience, most likely Jewish believers in Jesus, that they needed to look away from the earthly system and instead focus their attention and worship on Jesus. In other words, though the whole sanctuary service was to point to Christ, as believers they needed to move away from the symbols toward the reality, which was Jesus and His ministry for them in the heavenly sanctuary after His atoning death.

**How can we be sure that we do not make worship and the things of worship ends in themselves? How can we make sure that every aspect of our worship points us toward Jesus and His work on our behalf?**

## Lest We Forget!

Three of the longer psalms, Psalms 78, 105, and 106, are great hymns that were to be sung or recited to remind Israel of God's leading in the past.

**Read Psalm 78:1–8.** According to this passage, why does God want the people to remember their history? Read also Deut. 6:6–9, 1 Cor. 10:11. How can we take that same principle and apply it to ourselves in our own context and experience, which is so different from theirs?

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One of the ways God reveals Himself is through history. Yet, each generation must experience Him anew based on that history. For that reason, not only music but the proclamation of the Word of God in worship is vital to both old and new generations to keep before them His past leading. Psalm 78 is a warning that history must not repeat itself, but at the same time it is a heartwarming reminder of God's gracious dealings with His wayward people. There seems to be an urgency in the imperative promise, "Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength" (*vs. 4, NKJV*). Psalm 105:2 calls us to "Sing psalms to Him" and "Talk of all His wondrous works" (*NKJV; emphasis added*).

The longest poem in the psalter, Psalm 119, contains the frequent refrain, "Teach me thy statutes," indicating the importance of Scripture as the basis for teaching godly living and righteousness. Paul echoes this thought when he instructs the young preacher, Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction" (*2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV*).

Paul charges Timothy to "preach the word" (*2 Tim. 4:2, NKJV*). To neglect proclaiming the Word in worship is to dilute the power of the gospel to reach hearts, to change lives, and to enrich the worship experience of believers.

**How often have you had the experience of the Lord doing something wonderful and miraculous in your life, only to quickly forget it and show fear and lack of faith when a new crisis arose? Whether in corporate worship or in your own private worship, how can you learn to keep fresh in your mind God's leading in your life? Why is this so important to do?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Poetry and Song,” pp. 159–168, in *Education*; “Forgetfulness,” pp. 107–115, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“The Book of Psalms fulfills a unique role in the Bible. . . . [The Psalms] function in the Scriptures as the heartbeat of Israel’s religion. In this book of prayers the covenant people found their stairway to heaven. It reaches from the lowest depths of human agony and suffering to the highest joys of communion with God. Laments and cries of despair exchange with hymns of thanksgiving and praise. . . . This living interchange between man and God is perhaps the deeper reason why the Book of Psalms has been cherished as the invaluable jewel in the Hebrew Bible by seekers after God in all ages.” Further, they are a “disclosure of God’s own heart. . . . They stand as inspired examples of how God desires us all to respond by faith to the authentic revelations of Himself and of His deeds in the books of Moses.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 3, 4.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** It is one thing to trust in the justice of God’s ultimate judgment at the end of time—we have to trust in that hope and promise. At the same time, does this mean that we do not need to work for justice and judgment now because we know that it will ultimately come by God? How do we strike a right balance between seeking justice now and knowing that one day it will come?
- 2** Discuss more the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson regarding worship and the forms of worship in church. How is it possible that things such as music, preaching, liturgy, and so forth could become ends in themselves as opposed to being the means of pointing us toward the Lord? So often, we can mistake the symbols for the reality behind the symbols. How can we protect ourselves against this danger in our own worship services?

# Following the Light

by MOHAMMED

I live in an area of Nigeria where most people follow a religion other than Christianity. I studied in a religious school where teachers taught mostly the language and teachings of our religion. When I finished studying in that school, I wanted to receive a more practical education in a government primary school. My father reluctantly agreed. But when I asked to continue studying in the secondary school, he refused, saying it was too secular. So, I found work and secretly started saving money to continue my studies on my own.

One day as I was listening to the radio, I found an English-language station called Adventist World Radio. I liked the programs and began listening regularly. In time I realized that Jesus is more than a prophet; He is the way of salvation. I called the radio station and asked how I could learn more about Jesus. I wanted to become a Christian.

The people at the station were cautious, but they sensed my sincerity and gave me the name of a man I could study with. I had many questions, and we studied for hours at a time. I realized that salvation doesn't come by works but is a gift of God through Jesus. I accepted Jesus' sacrifice for me and asked to be baptized.

When I told my father that I had become a Christian, he was angry and told me that if he ever saw me again, he would kill me. Sadly, I left my father's house and went to live with the man who had become my spiritual father.

I enrolled in secondary school. But when the teachers learned that I was a Christian, they made life difficult for me. I had to transfer to a school in the Christian part of the city.

I want to finish school and return home to tell my family that Jesus isn't just a prophet. He is God, and He wants to be their Savior too. I know that this is dangerous, but Jesus died for me. How can I do less? So many in my country need to know the truth that I've found. And who better to tell them than someone who has lived among them and knows how they think? If I go as a Christian rather than as a convert from my former religion, I may be safe.

I am grateful that my Christian brothers and sisters helped me find the true faith through Adventist World Radio and a Christian education. I look forward to serving as a Global Mission pioneer one day soon. Your mission offerings help support many evangelistic efforts to reach people who, like me, are searching but have not yet found the light of life in Jesus.

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*MOHAMMED is preparing to serve God as a Global Mission pioneer in his homeland of Nigeria.*



# Conformity, Compromise, and Crisis in Worship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 6:5, Jer. 17:5, Deut. 12:8, 13:18, 1 Kings 11:1–13, 1 Kings 18, Mal. 3:16–4:6.*

**Memory Text:** “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (*Hebrews 5:14, NKJV*).

In 1954, novelist William Golding wrote *The Lord of the Flies*, a fictional account of a group of English children stranded on a deserted island after a plane crash. Golding used this story as a modern parable about the inherent evil in human beings. What made the narrative so powerful was that he used children, supposedly the essence of innocence, to make his point about just how corrupt, evil, egotistical, and violent humanity is at heart.

Christians, of course, would say, So tell us something we don't know. Human evil and sinfulness are part and parcel of the Christian message. The Bible is unambiguous on that point. But while the idea that evil is bad is quite uncontroversial, what is not so uncontroversial is the question, “What is evil?” Not everyone agrees on that.

This week, as we continue to look at the question of worship, we are going to look at a certain kind of evil that has brought devastating consequences to God's people and to humanity in general. We can view what this evil did to ancient Israel, but we need to ask the important question about just how susceptible we are to it ourselves.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.*

## In Different Eyes

**Read** the following texts. What is the one point that they all have in common? Why is it so important for us to always keep this in mind? *Gen. 6:5, Jer. 17:5, John 2:25, Rom. 3:9–12*. What kind of things exist in your culture that could cause you to forget this fundamental truth?

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All through Scripture, we are warned: the human heart is deceitful; people are corrupt; do not look to others; no one is immune from evil. With the exception, of course, of Jesus, who never sinned, few characters whom the Bible pays much attention to are pictured as morally unscathed.

One does not need Scripture, either, to see just how corrupt humanity is. History, newspapers, the daily news, indeed, even our homes, and at times our own hearts should suffice to show us the morally decrepit state of humanity. What should be scary for us to remember is that if a perfect being, as Lucifer originally was, could choose evil, even in the perfect environment of heaven; if other perfect beings, as Adam and Eve were, could choose evil, even in the perfect environment of Eden—then what about ourselves? We are born with corrupt and fallen natures, and we carry those natures with us in a fallen and corrupted environment. No wonder evil comes so easily, so naturally, to us. It is wired in our genes.

We have to be careful, however, in our understanding of what evil is. Some things are so manifestly evil, so manifestly bad, that anyone—whether a believer in God or not—would deem them as evil. Evil, however, can be much more subtle. Things that the world or our culture and our society might view as fine, as normal, as just the way things are, could be precisely what the Bible condemns as wrong, sinful, even evil.

**Contrast Deuteronomy 12:8 with Deuteronomy 13:18. What crucial difference is being made here? Why is this difference so important for us to understand?**

**What are some things your own society does not condemn that are clearly condemned by the Bible? More important, how much has society impacted you and the church in regard to these issues? That is, what things clearly condemned in Scripture might the church take too lightly, directly as a result of the influence of society? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## The Art (and Evil) of Compromise

Politics, it has been said, is the art of compromise. The word *art* in this instance is very important, for compromise can be a very subtle, nuanced action on the part of the person doing it. A good politician is someone who can get the people to concede points, to compromise positions, and often not even realize that they are doing just that. In this context, then, there is no doubt that Satan is the best politician around.

All through the Bible, we find examples of this evil—the evil of compromise. Not that every compromise is evil, of course not. In a certain sense, life itself is a kind of compromise. Instead, compromise becomes another manifestation of human evil and corruption when those who should know better fall away from the truth that God has given them.

For example . . .

**Read** 1 Kings 11:1–13. What happened here? How did this happen? What was it about Solomon that made his actions here so bad? How did this apostasy impact worship, faith, and the whole religious system of Israel? Also, and most important, what lessons can we draw for ourselves today from this episode and the whole question of compromise?

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Perhaps the most revealing phrase in this block of texts is the statement that it was “when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). In other words, it did not happen overnight. The faithful, dedicated, and godly man revealed in the Bible did not suddenly, out of nowhere, turn away from the Lord. Instead, the change happened bit by bit, over time; a little compromise here, a little there, each step taking him further and further from where he should have been until he was doing something that the Solomon of his earlier years no doubt would have been horrified to see.

Look, too, at what his compromises did to worship in Israel. They had a negative impact that would last for generations and beyond.

**Every now and then you hear stories about people who left the Seventh-day Adventist Church years ago, severed ties with it completely, and then came back, only to be shocked by some of the changes that they saw in areas such as theology, standards, and worship. Though that might not be bad in every case, it might very well be bad in some. How can we know the difference?**

## Counterfeit Worship

In 1 Kings 11, Ahijah came to Jeroboam, Solomon's servant, with a message that he would become king over ten of the tribes of Israel (vss. 26–31). But the prophet made it clear to Jeroboam that his success would depend on his faithfulness to God's commandments (vss. 37, 38).

Unfortunately, Jeroboam listened only to what he wanted to hear and he forgot the conditions of success. He was all too ready to lead in the revolt (1 Kings 12:16–20), and almost immediately he took steps to prevent his subjects from returning to Jerusalem to worship.

**Read** 1 Kings 12:25–27. What does this tell us about the power and influence worship can have on the human mind?

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Look at the account of Jeroboam's setting up a counterfeit religion that would eventually separate Israel from the worship of the true God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25–33). Notice how this new worship resembled the worship of the true God and at the same time contradicted most of the clear counsel of Yahweh:

1. Offered sacrifices and ordained non-Levite priests (vss. 31–33).
2. Made calves of gold to worship (vs. 28).
3. Made Bethel a place of worship (vs. 29).
4. Made Dan a place of worship (vs. 29).
5. Instituted a rival feast to the Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 32).
6. Built shrines on high places (vs. 31).

Counterfeit money cannot deceive unless it looks like the real thing. In the same way, Jeroboam knew that his false worship must have many of the same elements of worship that the people were accustomed to, though he eventually declared, pointing to the golden calves, “ ‘Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ ” (vs. 28, *NKJV*).

**It is so easy from our perspective today to look back and wonder, *How could they have fallen into such blatant apostasy?* On the other hand, humans have an incredible capacity to deceive themselves (it is all part of our fallen and corrupted nature), and we deceive ourselves if we think we are not just as vulnerable as they were back then. Look at yourself, your lifestyle, your mode of worship. What might you be doing that is, in principle, not a whole lot different from what happened here? How willing are you to make changes, if need be?**

## Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Things went from bad to worse in the north, especially when it came to the question of worship under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. It is against this background (*see 1 Kings 17–19*) that we come to the famous story of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Here, we can see just how far compromise had taken them.

**Read 1 Kings 18.** Notice the difference in “worship styles” between Elijah and these false prophets. What lessons might we take away that could be relevant for ourselves today and the whole question of worship?

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It must have been quite a scene: these prophets of Baal wailing, leaping, crying (who knows what kind of music might have accompanied their ritual), prophesying, even cutting themselves and spilling their own blood as part of their worship of Baal. These were certainly hyped-up people, full of zeal and passion for their faith and their god, a zeal and passion that testified to the sincerity of their beliefs.

Today, too, some Christian worship services could remind one at times of something like this: a lot of emotion, a lot of hype, and a lot of noise. Though we want to avoid worship services that remind people of funerals, we also do not want worship services that remind them of priests of Baal at Mount Carmel either. Some seem to think the more sounds they make, the louder the music, the more emotional excitement generated, the better the worship service. Yet, that is not what worship is about.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from this account is that all worship must be focused on the true Lord, on the Creator. True worship needs to be grounded in the Word of God, pointing the worshiper to the Lord and His activity in history. In contrast to all the bedlam of the priests of Baal, Elijah prayed a simple prayer, “ ‘Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God’ ” (*vs. 37*). This was no Elijah show. It was about worshiping the true God in contrast to any and all false ones, regardless of the form they take.

Our worship services should always present worshipers with the question that Elijah asked Israel: “ ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him’ ” (*vs. 21, NIV*). Our worship experience should force us to look inside our hearts and see where our true love and devotion are: on the Lord or on anything else.

## The Elijah Message

**“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not”** (*Mal. 3:18*).

For all the drama, Elijah’s confrontation with the 150 prophets on Mount Carmel boiled down to one question for the people gathered there with them: “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (*1 Kings 18:21, NIV*). However specific the context was, it really asks a question that each individual must answer for herself or himself: Do we worship and follow the true God or not? We might be able to “waver between two opinions” for only so long, but sooner or later we all come down on one side or another.

At the end of time, when the great controversy is over, all humanity will have been forever divided into one of two classes: “between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (*Mal. 3:18*). As Jesus so bluntly and clearly said it: “ ‘He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth’ ” (*Luke 11:23*). How much plainer could He be?

**With** the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel in the background, read **Malachi 3:16–4:6**. What is the Lord telling us here? How do we understand this “Elijah message” in the context of last-day events and the whole question of worship? See *Rev. 14:7–12*.

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Just as John the Baptist, whom Jesus referred to as “Elijah” (*Matt. 17:11–13*), had a message of reformation, repentance, and obedience, Malachi makes it clear (*Mal. 4:1, 5*) that “Elijah” will again come just before the end of sin and evil. The book of Revelation proclaims to the last generation a message of warning, a call to obedience, and a call to worship the Creator God. As with Elijah on Carmel, people will in a very dramatic way have to make the most important choice of their lives, a choice that is filled with truly eternal consequences. The good news is that even before these final events unfold we can make daily choices that will greatly prepare us to be on the Lord’s side when the climactic battle between good and evil unfolds among the nations.

**Think about the daily choices you’ve made (perhaps in the past few days), even on the smallest of things (see *Luke 16:10*). Judging by those choices (and the compromises that might be manifest in those choices), which of the two sides are you choosing? Dwell on the implications of your answer.**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Jeroboam,” pp. 99–108; “National Apostasy,” pp. 114–116; “Elijah the Tishbite,” pp. 119–128; “The Voice of Stern Rebuke,” pp. 139–142; “Carmel,” pp. 143–154, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The apostasy prevailing today is similar to that which in the prophet’s day overspread Israel.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 170.

“God has many thousands [in this age] who have not bowed the knee to Baal . . . [and] many who have been worshiping Baal ignorantly, but with whom the Spirit of God is still striving.”—p. 171.

A. W. Tozer, a well-known preacher of the twentieth century (he died in 1963), often preached against the worship of the “god of entertainment,” suggesting that no matter how hard they try, churches cannot compete with the world’s idea of entertainment. It is the cross of Jesus Christ, says Tozer, not entertainment, that will win souls to Christ. See A. W. Tozer, *Tozer On Worship and Entertainment*, compiled by James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, Penn.: Wing Spread Publishers, 1997), pp. 108, 109.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Sunday’s question. How much has your society impacted the church’s views on the moral issues of the day?
- 2 The descriptions of Baal worship hint that it was highly entertaining, which could help explain its popularity. How can we restore the sense of awe and reverence for God in our worship rather than encouraging expectations of being entertained?
- 3 How has the Seventh-day Adventist Church changed in the past twenty years? In your opinion, in what ways has it changed for the better, and in what ways not? If time should last, what do you think the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be like in twenty years? Try to imagine what your local church’s worship service will be like.
- 4 Think about how drastically the nation of Israel fell into apostasy. Again, none of this happened overnight. The devil, if nothing else, is patient. How can we protect ourselves individually, and the church as a whole, from slowly but surely going the same way as Israel?

## The Sermon That Changed a Family

Maria, ten, lives in Quito, Ecuador. When she was seven years old, her mother started attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church and took Maria and her brother with her. Maria loved church!

In South America, Adventist children are encouraged to preach, and one day a woman asked Maria to preach in church. Maria had seen other children preach and agreed to try.

Maria worked hard to memorize the short sermon the woman gave her. She practiced it while standing in front of a mirror and then for her mother. On Sabbath she was nervous, but she felt ready.

Before church Maria and her mother asked God to use Maria's words to lead people to Jesus. Maria had no idea that God had something special in store for her.

Maria's father, who wasn't a Christian and didn't go to church, sometimes accused her mother of going to church to meet someone. On this Sabbath he decided to check to be sure that his wife really was in church. He stepped into the church just as Maria stood to preach.

Maria was startled when she saw her father walk in. She prayed silently that God would speak to him through her words. As she began to speak, she felt God guiding her words.

At the end of her sermon, Maria invited those who wanted to follow Jesus to come to the altar. Thirty people came forward, including her father. With tears in his eyes, he whispered to Maria, "Thank you so much. Please pray that God will change my heart and my mind."

As Maria prayed for those who had come forward, she was praying especially for her father. After church, the family returned home together and had a wonderful Sabbath.

Maria saw changes in her father. He gave up smoking and drinking, and sometimes he went to church with the family. But he loved soccer and didn't want to miss a chance to play in order to go to church. Then one day he hurt his foot and couldn't play. He told Maria, "I guess my sore foot is God's way of telling me to go to church."

Father began attending church every Sabbath. A few months later, he asked to be baptized. Her mother hadn't been baptized yet either, so Maria's parents were baptized together. The next week Maria and her brother were baptized.

"I'm so glad that God used me to bring my family together to worship," Maria says. "We must all do whatever God asks us to share His love with others. You never know who may come to Jesus because of something you say or do."



# “Trust Not *in* Deceptive Words”: The Prophets *and* Worship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Mic. 6:1–8, Isa. 6:1–8, Isa. 1:11–15, Isa. 58:1–10, Isaiah 44, Jer. 7:1–10.*

**Memory Text:** “‘Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come’ ” (*Isaiah 44:7, NIV*).

Russian author Ivan Turgenev, in his story *Fathers and Sons*, put these words in the mouth of a character: “The life of each of us hangs by a thread, an abyss may gape beneath us any minute, and yet we go out of our way to cook up all sorts of trouble for ourselves and to mess up our lives.”—*Fathers and Sons* (New York: Signet Classics, 2005), p. 131.

Of course, the Lord offers a better way to live. He offers us the opportunity to follow Him, to love Him, to worship Him, and hence to spare ourselves many of the problems that we would otherwise bring upon ourselves.

Yet, merely professing to follow the Lord is not what the Christian life is about. This week, we will look at what a few prophets said about those who thought that their “worship” of the true God, in the true temple on the true Sabbath day, was all that mattered, regardless of how they lived the rest of the week. As the prophets show, this is a deception, a good way to “cook up all sorts of trouble for ourselves.”

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.*

## A Thousand Rams?

Unlike every other religion, the religion of the Bible (both Testaments) teaches that salvation is by grace alone. Nothing we do can ever make us good enough to be accepted by God. Our good deeds, however well-intended, however Spirit-inspired, can never bridge the gap that sin has caused between God and humanity. If good works could save us, if good works could atone for sin, if good works could pay our debt before God, if good works could reunite fallen humanity with the Creator, then Jesus never would have had to die for us, and the plan of salvation would be something radically different from what it is.

As it stands, only the death of Jesus credited to us by faith, only the righteousness of Christ, which He wrought out in His life, which is then given to all who truly accept it, can save the sinner. Sin is so bad, so contrary to the basic principles of God's government, which is based on love and free choice, that nothing less than the death of Christ could solve the problem created by sin.

All that being said, the Bible is clear that what we say, what we do, and what we think all matter, and these thoughts and actions reveal the reality of our experience with God.

**With** the above in mind, read Micah 6:1–8. What point is the prophet making here, especially in regard to the question of the sacrifices (part of the worship service in Israel), symbolic of the plan of salvation? How can these words be applied to us today? *See also Deut. 10:12, 13.*

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Those who claim to be children of God but who fail to show justice and mercy to their fellow men are acting out the spirit of Satan no matter how piously they may adhere to the forms of worship. On the other hand, those who walk humbly with their God will not neglect the principles of justice and mercy, nor will they scorn the proper forms of worship. God is looking for true worshipers who are willing to demonstrate their love for Him by obedient lives, motivated by humble hearts. What do all the right prayers, all the right styles of worship, and all the right theology mean if the person is nasty, unkind, arrogant, unjust, and unmerciful to others?

**What do you think is more important: correct theology or correct actions? Can you have your theology right and yet treat others in a poor manner? What hope can you cling to if, perhaps, you see yourself revealed in the above texts?**

## The Call of Isaiah

While Hosea, Amos, and Micah were warning Israel of their imminent danger, Judah seemed to be prospering under the reign of several good kings. King Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was known and respected among the nations for his wise leadership and accomplishments (*see 2 Chron. 26:1–15*). But, as often happens, his success became his downfall. Humility was replaced by pride and devotion by presumption (*see vs. 16–21*).

The people of Judah appeared to be prospering spiritually as well. The temple services were well-attended with a formality of religious fervor. Yet, many of the same evils that afflicted the people of Israel were fast corrupting the kingdom of Judah. It is at this time that the Lord calls Isaiah to His special work.

**Read Isaiah 6:1–8.** Why do you think Isaiah would respond as he did (*vs. 5*) upon seeing a vision of the Lord? What important *theological truth* is revealed here?

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Try to imagine Isaiah’s overwhelming reaction to this heavenly revelation of the glory of God. Suddenly, he sees his own sins and the sins of his people stand out in bold relief against the spotless purity and the majestic holiness of Almighty God. No wonder he reacted as he did! It is hard to imagine anyone doing otherwise.

Here we see played out before us a crucial and foundational truth regarding the state of humanity, especially in contrast to the holiness and glory of God. We see an attitude of repentance, of a willingness to acknowledge one’s own sinfulness, one’s own need of grace.

Think for a moment what our worship services would be like were they to elicit in the worshipers a sense that they have been in the presence of our Holy God, which in turn makes them deeply aware of their own sinfulness and need of His saving grace and cleansing power. Imagine if the singing, the liturgy, the prayer, and the preaching worked together in a way to lead us each time to faith, to repentance, to cleansing, and to a willingness to cry out, “Here I am; send me.” That is what worship should be about.

**Imagine yourself standing in the physical presence of Jesus. That is, if He were standing in the flesh right before you. What would your reaction be? What would you say? Or do? What about His promise to us in Matthew 28:20? What does that promise mean to us now, on a practical level?**

## No More Vain Oblations

It is easy to forget that so much of the writing of the Old Testament, especially the writings of the prophets, was written as admonitions and warnings to God's covenant people, to the ones who were His "true church." Most of these people professed to follow the true God, had a basic understanding of biblical truths (at least much more than their heathen neighbors), and knew the right things to say and do in worship. Yet, as becomes very clear to anyone reading the prophets, all this was nowhere near enough.

**Read** Isaiah 1:11–15. How are we to understand what the Lord, who instituted all these services, is saying to them?

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The answer is found, really, in the few verses that follow (*Isa. 1:16–18*), which in many ways is similar to what we saw in Sunday's lesson on Micah. No question, the church is for sinners, and if we had to wait until we were perfect before we could worship the Lord, then none of us would worship Him.

But that is not what the Bible is saying here or what it ever says. It is saying that God is more interested in how we treat others, especially the weak and helpless among us, than He is in all sorts of religious rituals, even the ones He instituted.

**Read** Isaiah 58:1–10. What is wrong with the fasting described here? How does God say that the people should fast? What point can we take from this for ourselves, whether or not we fast?

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Fasting is a form of self-denial of which Jesus had much to say. But some kinds of fasting are nothing but a vain show. It is a symptom of hypocrisy, which covets the privileges of obedience while detesting its responsibilities. Self-denial, motivated by love for God, ministers to those in need. This is the kind of fasting (self-denial) that honors Him; this is the kind of life that leads to the kind of worship that He does not despise, a worship that shows the sinner that, just as he or she has been the recipient of grace and undeserved love, so, too, he must dispense grace and undeserved love to others. That is the kind of self-denial that reveals true faith (*Luke 9:23*), the kind of self-denial at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

## Profitable for Nothing?

South African writer Laurens van der Post once wrote about what he called “the burden of meaninglessness,” this sense some people have that, when it was all said and done, what, if anything, did their lives mean? Sooner or later, they will be dead, and anyone who knew them will be dead, and before long all memory of them will be forever gone too. In such a scenario, what do our lives mean, what can they mean? How easy it can be to get the sense that so much of what we do has no real meaning, no real lasting importance.

**With** these thoughts in mind, read Isaiah 44. Then, on the lines below, summarize the essence of those verses, particularly as they relate to the question of worship and what people worship.

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However much Isaiah was writing for his time and culture and people, look at how relevant the principles are for us today. The Lord, He alone is the Creator, He alone is our Redeemer, He alone can save us, thus He alone is worthy of our worship and our praise. Isaiah mocks those who create idols with their own hands, gods of their own making, and then bow down and worship them—things that are, indeed, “profitable for nothing.”

And yet, as silly and as foolish as all that seems to us, are we not in danger of doing something similar, of dedicating ourselves, our lives, our time, and our energy into things that, in the end, are “profitable for nothing,” that cannot answer the deepest need of our souls now, and that surely cannot redeem us from the grave at the end of time? How crucial that we watch and pray, that, as Paul said, we examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (*2 Cor. 13:5*). Sabbath worship, if done right, can remind us in a special way about why we should worship only the Lord. Worship should be a time that especially reminds us of what is important in life, what truly matters, and what is temporal, and even “profitable for nothing.”

**We all know the danger of making idols out of money, power, prestige, and so on. What about the danger of making idols out of things such as church, the pastor, our own ministries, or even our own faithfulness or lifestyle or piety? Think this through and bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## “This Is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord. . . .”

The southern kingdom of Judah had its spiritual ups and downs, times of reform and times of outright apostasy. Yet so often, even during the worst spiritual times, there was an outward show of piety and worship that was not acceptable to the Lord. How careful we need to be not to fall into the same deception ourselves.

**Read** Jeremiah 7:1–10. What theme do we see repeated here that we have seen all week? How can we take the principles here and apply them to ourselves in our context today?

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Look especially at verse 4. In one sense, the speakers were right. This was the “temple of the Lord,” the place where the Lord’s name was to dwell, the place where the sacrificial system—which God Himself had instituted—was performed, the place where the great truths of sacrifice, salvation, cleansing, and judgment were taught. After all, these were the covenant people. Their God was the true God, and they had more light and more truth, corporately, than their pagan neighbors around them had. None of this can be disputed, and yet, the Lord obviously was not pleased with them or their worship. In fact, He called out the words, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord”—what? “Deceptive words?” They were deceptive, not because that was not the temple of the Lord but because the people believed that simply by coming to the temple of the Lord and worshiping there that they were safe, they were saved, they were doing all that was required.

With all the light that we have been given, in what way might we as Seventh-day Adventists be in danger of making the same mistake these people made? Think through possible parallels between them and us and how, if we are not careful, we could fall into a similar deception. What possible “deceptive words” might we be in danger of trusting in, words that on the surface are true (just as that was, indeed, “the temple of the Lord”) and yet could lead us into making the same kind of presumptuous errors?

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Isaiah,” pp. 303–310; “Hezekiah,” pp. 331–339; “Deliverance From Assyria,” pp. 349–366; “Manasseh and Josiah,” pp. 381–391; “Jeremiah,” pp. 407–421, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“In Isaiah’s day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. . . .

“In losing sight of the true character of Jehovah, the Israelites were without excuse. Often had God revealed Himself to them as one ‘full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.’ Psalm 86:15.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 311, 312.

“In the vision that came to Isaiah in the temple court, he was given a clear view of the character of the God of Israel. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy,’ had appeared before him in great majesty; yet the prophet was made to understand the compassionate nature of his Lord. . . .”—p. 314.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s final question. What are some “good” things that we can make into idols? How do we know when something has become an idol?
- ❷ Dwell more on the issues touched on in Thursday’s lesson. Look at the things that the people were doing, all the time coming to “the temple of the Lord” and worshiping there (*see Jer. 7:4*), things that were so contrary to the revealed word of God. How can we learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same trap? Why does simple obedience to God’s revealed Word play such an important role in protecting us from all sorts of deception?
- ❸ Think about the worship services in your local church. Do you come away with a sense of the awe and majesty of God in contrast to your own sinfulness and need of grace? If not, what could be changed in order to help the church as a whole have, to some degree, the experience that Isaiah had? (*See Monday’s lesson.*) Why is that so important?
- ❹ How many things do you do in your life that are “profitable for nothing”? How much time do you spend basically “wasting time,” doing things that, in and of themselves, are useless, vain, and basically “profitable for nothing”? How can you learn to make better use of the limited time we all have here in this life?

# Cult to Convict to Christian

by HENSLEY DYER

I was lost, physically and spiritually lost. For years I searched for a spiritual anchor. I knew who Jesus was, but I didn't know Him personally. I joined a cult and eventually became possessed by demonic forces from whom I couldn't break free.

I sensed the Holy Spirit telling me to leave the religion I was in, so I did. But leaving the drugs and alcohol was harder. And the demons wouldn't leave me. I tried to sort out my spiritual life, and the Holy Spirit convicted me of my need to surrender to Jesus. But my life was still a mess.

Then my wife told me to leave. I had no money, no home, no car. I prayed, "God, if You carry me through this, I'll serve You the rest of my life." God opened my eyes to my spiritual condition, and He walked through the fire with me. I prayed for forgiveness and forgave everyone who had ever hurt me. Then one day I was arrested and sentenced to prison for crimes I had committed years earlier. It was the best thing that ever happened to me.

I prayed and read the Bible more. God showed me the Ten Commandments. I realized I had been breaking several of them. I knew nothing about the Sabbath, but I wanted to obey. I started looking for an Adventist pastor.

Churches hold meetings on Thursdays, but I didn't want to go. But a fellow prisoner invited me, so I went. I sat down next to a woman who said she was an Adventist. I was so excited! I asked for Bible lessons, and I began spending the Sabbath studying the Bible and the Bible lessons. I discovered so many things I didn't know before. God impressed me to share what I was learning with others.

Then one day, unexpectedly, I was released. I was out of prison with a place to stay and my prison ministry friends to help me. I went to the Adventist Church and met the pastor. He offered to pick me up on Sabbath morning. When I told him I was an ex-prisoner, he said, "It doesn't matter. God loves you, and His people will love you too." And they did.

God has delivered me from my past and my sins. I'm His child now.

God used many people to lead me to Jesus, and I praise Him for their help. Your mission offerings help sponsor outreach such as the prison ministries program that helped build my foundation of faith. I thank you.



HENSLEY DYER (left) lives in New Zealand.



# Worship: From Exile to Restoration



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ezekiel 8, Daniel 3, Jer. 29:10–14, Haggai 1, Zech. 1:1–6, Nehemiah 1.*

**Memory Text:** “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes” (*Haggai 1:6*).

It is very hard from our perspective today—removed as we are by more than one thousand nine hundred years from the final destruction of the Jerusalem temple—to understand just how significant the temple was in the Jewish nation's national and religious life. It was the apex of worship, the center of their ethnic and religious identity. It was where the Lord said He would dwell and rule in the midst of Israel. It was where the follower of YHWH found cleansing, forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation.

Because it was, truly, the Lord's house, many people disbelieved the prophetic warnings that it would be destroyed by Babylon. *How could the Lord allow His sacred temple to be obliterated?* We only can guess at the shock when, indeed, as the prophets warned, the Babylonians razed it. And yet, even amid all the devastation, the Lord promised that the nation would be restored, the temple rebuilt, and Israel given another chance to fulfill her prophetic destiny.

This week we will look at some of the issues regarding worship during the time of the exile and, then, the promised restoration.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.*

## “Son of Man, Have You Seen . . . ?”

Apostasy does not happen overnight; whole peoples do not fall away in a day, a week, even in a year. The process is much slower; a little change here, a little compromise there; a little less rigidity in order to keep up with the times, or to be relevant, or to fit better with the trends of society and culture. Bit by bit, step by step, and before long, a whole nation is doing things that, perhaps a generation or two ago, would have been looked upon in horror. Such was the fate of ancient Israel and Judah; such was the fate of early Christianity. Such can be the fate of any church, including ours, that does not carefully and jealously guard the sacred truths and practices given it by the Lord.

**Read** Ezekiel 8. As you read, realize all this was taking place in the sacred temple that the Lord had instituted, the very place where the Lord had promised to place His name. How could the people, the spiritual leaders, have fallen into such apostasy? What lessons can we learn from this for ourselves?

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The secret sins, indulged by priests and elders, were the abominable and repulsive worship practices of their culture. Those who should have been leading God’s people in true worship were adapting that worship to the sinful and corrupt customs of their time and environment, thus bringing the abominations of the surrounding culture into God’s holy sanctuary. How ironic that only the coming of the Babylonian army would bring an end to the desecration of God’s temple, and then only by destroying it.

**Carefully** read Ezekiel 8:12. What kind of logic and rationale were these elders using to justify their actions? What might have led them to such false conclusions?

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These people must have turned so far away from the Lord that they believed He did not see them or that He did not care about their practices. The Lord, who again and again showed His care, His nearness, and His desire for obedience, now *was deemed to have forsaken the land*? How careful we need to be, because sin will harden our hearts and poison our minds until we rationalize even the most horrific practices.

## Worshipping the Image

As we have touched on all through this quarter, the final test in the last days deals with the question of worship (*Rev. 14:1–12*). All humanity will be split into two camps: those who worship the Creator, the One who made the heavens and the earth, and those who worship the beast and his image. Even though this sequence in the prophetic picture has yet to unfold, one could argue that, even now, all the world is divided into two camps: those who are faithful to the Lord and those who are not. There is no middle ground either: we are on one side or the other.

With this in mind, the story of the three Hebrew boys in the book of Daniel becomes quite relevant. It is not just a dramatic story of a supernatural rescue of those faithful followers of YHWH. It becomes, instead, a symbol, a type, for the test of worship that will come upon the world just before the second coming of Christ.

**Read Daniel 3. Compare the worship of the image there with the worship of the image in Revelation 14. What can we learn from this story that can help us understand the issue regarding the mark of the beast?**

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The second commandment, the one forbidding idolatry (*Exod. 20:4–6*), was at issue here; the fourth commandment (*Exod. 20:8–11*), the Sabbath commandment, will be the outward issue in the last days. How interesting that these both are commandments that were changed and tampered with by the beast power itself (*see Dan. 7:25*). Both commandments are tied in directly with worship; the second forbids the worship of idols, while the fourth shows why one should not worship idols, and that is because the Lord of nature, not nature itself, is the One who created and redeemed them (*see also Deut. 5:12–15*).

In both cases, too, there is an earthly political/religious entity that wants the worship and fealty owed only to the Lord, and in both cases this power is willing to resort to violence in order to get that “worship.”

**Think through what it means to worship something. Is it always wrong to worship anything other than the Lord? If not, why not? Might there be some things that we can worship without sinning, without violating God’s law? If so, what? If not, how can we make sure we are not worshipping anything other than our Lord?**

## “Consider Your Ways”

**Read** Jeremiah 29:10–14. What does this tell us about the character of God? What hope can we, in our own context, take from these texts?

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After seventy years, as foretold, the Lord began the restoration of the exiles back to the Promised Land. Israel was to be given another chance to fulfill her prophetic destiny.

Central to that role was, of course, the temple, the sanctuary, the place where the entire plan of salvation was taught through the types and symbols of the service. Here the work and mission of the Messiah, through which the whole world could have salvation, was prefigured (*see John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 8:1, 2*).

Yet, the work of rebuilding the temple did not go as smoothly or as quickly as it should have. Forces, internal and external, got in the way, and the work was delayed. This was not as the Lord would have it, and He spoke through Haggai to let the people know His displeasure.

**Read** Haggai 1. What happened here? What diverted their attention? Why is that so easy to do?

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How easy it is to let worldly toils, worldly desires, even worldly needs get in the way of our spiritual responsibilities. The Lord let them know that they would never have true satisfaction apart from their devotion to Him and the work He had given them to do. All too often we can, in our own way, make the same mistake, getting so caught up in the ways of the world that we neglect what should be first and foremost in our lives: our relationship with God. Maybe the Lord is saying to us, either corporately or individually, “Consider your ways.”

**Consider your ways. What do your ways, your actions, the things you do, and don't do—what do they say about your relationship to the Lord? In what ways might you be guilty of the same things as the people depicted here in Haggai?**

## Your Fathers, Where Are They?

The rebuilding of the temple took approximately twelve years. Ezra 5:1, 2 refers to Zechariah as one of the “prophets of God helping them.” His emphasis, like Haggai’s, was upon the glory that would one day inhabit the temple.

Yet, as often is with prophecy, the promises are not unconditional. Humans, given free will, must make the choice to obey the Lord, to do what He commands, not as a means of salvation but as a means of showing the fruit and the benefits of salvation.

Human freedom is an unspoken assumption all through the Scriptures. People have the option to choose whom they will serve and worship, and the fulfillment of the promises is incumbent upon the choices that people make. The Bible is filled with wonderful promises to any and all who faithfully seek and serve Him.

**Read Zechariah 1:1–6. What theme is found here that is repeated, again and again, through pretty much all of the Bible? How is the reality of human free will and free choice revealed in these texts?**

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Some of the most poignant words in that text are found in verse 5. “Your fathers, where are they?” In other words, learn from the mistakes of those who came before you; do not do what they did; learn from the past, learn from what happened before you.

Here is where the ministry of the pastor in the pulpit can come in. Here is where the pastor can, in the role of the prophets, point the people to the Lord’s leading, to His promises, and to the conditions of those promises. The preaching of the Word should not cause theological confusion or controversy: it should be Christ centered, pointing to what the Lord has done for us, what He offers to do for us, and what He will do for us, all on the condition that we come to Him in faith and repentance. That is essentially what Zechariah is saying to the people here: repent, turn from your evil ways, learn from the past, and put your hope in the Lord and the promises of the Lord for the future. In the same way, today, with the revelation of what the sanctuary service was all about (the life and death and high priestly ministry of Jesus), we should come to the Lord and worship Him in an attitude of faith, repentance, and obedience. Again, though obedience cannot save us (it is way too late for that), there is no such thing as salvation without it, regardless of how flawed our obedience tends to be.

## Nehemiah's Prayer

Despite all the promises of restoration, things were not going well in Jerusalem. The people faced obstacle after obstacle, many of them as a result of their own disobedience. The prophet Nehemiah, while serving the Persian king, received word about the situation there and responded with fasting, mourning, and prayer. His passion and concern for the situation clearly are revealed in the first chapter of the book that bears his name.

**Read** Nehemiah 1, his prayer in response to what he heard, and then answer the following questions:

1. Why would Nehemiah, who as far as we know was faithful, include himself among those who had sinned against the Lord? *See Dan. 9:5, 6.*

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2. What kind of prayer is this, and why is this kind of prayer so important? *See Exod. 32:31–34, James 5:16.*

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3. In what ways is the conditionality of prophecy revealed in this prayer?

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4. On what basis does he make his appeal to the Lord on behalf of the people? In other words, why should the Lord listen to this appeal? *See Gen. 12:1–3; Exod. 6:4, 5.*

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**Write a prayer of intercession for the Seventh-day Adventist Church today and bring it to class on Sabbath and compare what you write. What do our answers tell us about how we perceive the various spiritual needs of the church? More important, how can we help bring about whatever reforms we deem necessary?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Return of the Exiles,” pp. 551–566; “The Prophets of God Helping Them,” pp. 567–581; “Ezra, the Priest and Scribe,” pp. 607–617; “A Spiritual Revival,” pp. 618–627; “Instructed in the Law of God,” pp. 661–668; “Reformation,” pp. 669–678, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The season of distress before God’s people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 512; emphasis supplied.

“There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with [worldly people], they must to a certain extent conform to the world. But though such a course may appear to afford great advantages, it always ends in spiritual loss.”—p. 570; emphasis supplied.

“In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, . . . neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. . . . They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed.”—p. 675.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the prayers of intercession for the Seventh-day Adventist Church that were written in response to Thursday’s lesson. What can we learn from each of these prayers? What do people perceive as the greatest need of the church at the present time?
- 2 What lessons can we learn from our own church fathers (and mothers)? That is, what important spiritual lessons can our own Seventh-day Adventist history teach us?
- 3 What are ways in which we, as a church, in our efforts to reach out to the surrounding culture, are in danger of compromising crucial truths? Why are we so often blind to it when it happens?
- 4 While there is always the danger of compromising ourselves in an attempt to be relevant, there is also the danger of locking ourselves in beliefs or practices that, perhaps, need refining or changing. How can we know what is immutable and unchangeable, in contrast to that which can and should change with the times?

## A Kindness Pays

Julie is a lay evangelist. She and her team partner were sharing God's love in a village near Chennai, India. But no one seemed interested. So they knocked on the door of a house a short distance away. A woman answered and welcomed Julie and her partner inside. They learned that the woman's name was Sujatha, and she and her husband were Christians. But no other Christians lived nearby.

Julie and her partner visited Sujatha's home every day to study the Bible. Sujatha invited other family members, all women, but her husband, Erwin, never attended. Julie learned that Erwin was shy and uncomfortable around strangers. He left the house whenever someone came to visit. Sujatha told Julie that after they left, Erwin would ask what they had talked about. He asked her to ask for prayer for their family. Julie prayed for a way to engage Erwin in the studies.

Julie and her partner had to attend three days of meetings elsewhere and couldn't visit the family, but they left their cell phone number in case the family wanted to contact them. One afternoon they answered a call and were surprised to learn it was Sujatha's husband. "My wife is seriously ill," he told Julie. "Please pray for her."

Julie and her partner prayed for Sujatha. As soon as their meetings ended, they hurried back to visit the family. They found Sujatha seriously ill with a high fever. "We gave Erwin what little money we had and told him to take Sujatha to the hospital. There, doctors discovered that she had typhoid." Julie and her partner stayed at the house and cleaned it thoroughly.

After Sujatha returned home, Erwin stayed and talked with Julie and her partner during their Bible studies. Julie learned that the family had considered ending their lives because they were so poor. But a Christian had offered them a job and a place to live. In time they had joined a Protestant church. They were still poor, but they had hope.

As Sujatha's strength grew, she shared her new faith with a neighbor. Within a few weeks she was bringing her neighbor to the church. Sujatha has been baptized, and Erwin is preparing for baptism. Sujatha is studying with five other families in her neighborhood, and Julie is helping her introduce them to Christ.

A kindness sown in one couple is reaping seeds in six other families. Our mission offerings help support lay evangelists and Global Mission pioneers such as Julie around the world. Thank you for helping to tell the world that Jesus loves them.

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*Julie is a lay evangelist living in Chennai, India.*



# In Spirit *and* in Truth



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 1:46–55, 4:5–8, Deut. 11:16, John 4:1–24, Luke 19:37–40.*

**Memory Text:** “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (*John 4:23*).

As we have seen all quarter, the first angel's message is a call to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.” At the center of that gospel is Jesus, the incarnate God, the God who through forces and means that our minds cannot even begin to grasp came into this world as a human being.

Think through what this means: the God who created all that was created (*John 1:1–3*) became a human, and in that humanity lived a sinless life and then offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. When you think about the size of the cosmos, the billions of galaxies, each composed of billions of stars, and to believe that the One who created all this was Jesus, it defies the human mind; it is something so incredible we barely can comprehend it. No wonder Paul wrote: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor. 1:18*).

With a truth like this before us, it is no wonder we want to worship such a God. This week we will explore themes of worship and praise as revealed in the ministry of the incarnate Christ, the Creator who took upon Himself the form and the flesh of the created.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.*

## Mary's Song of Praise and Worship

Though Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been the subject of an intense amount of religious interest through the centuries, most of that interest is tradition derived from a host of sources that are not rooted in Scripture.

Nevertheless, in the question of Christ's coming to earth, Mary played a crucial and pivotal role: in her womb the Savior of the world was miraculously conceived; in her womb He grew into the infant Jesus. Looking back with all the hindsight and light given us in the New Testament, we only can marvel at the miracle. Though no doubt knowing that she was part of an incredible event that was to have important consequences for her people, the young Mary most likely had no real idea of what she was going to be part of. She knew enough, though, that she could marvel at the amazing circumstances that had so radically changed her life.

**Read** Luke 1:46–55, often known as the Song of Mary. What is the background to this song? Why is she singing it? What elements of praise and worship are revealed here? What appears here that we have touched on all through the quarter?

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This song of praise and worship is filled with allusions and images taken from the Old Testament, the only Scripture that she would have known. Here we can see her giving glory to the Lord and acknowledging His leading not only in her own life but among her own people, as well. Her allusion to Abraham is, clearly, a reference to the covenant the Lord made with His people; she is praising God for His promises to them and sees those promises as her hope and her people's hope for the future.

Again, however much she did not know, she knew enough to see the working of the Lord. For that, she was thankful and worshipful.

**How much of the miraculous do you see in your own life? Might it be there and yet you are just too hard, too closed, too wrapped up in yourself to see it as you should?**

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## Worship and Serve

**“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”** (*Luke 4:5–8*).

Imagine Jesus, after 40 full days of hunger, weariness, self-denial, and privation, now facing the open and blatant temptations of the devil. It is not hard to imagine just how beautiful all “the kingdoms of the world” in their “power” and their “glory” must have appeared to Jesus in this temptation. Satan has been a master at making the things of this world always look so charming, so pleasant, so fulfilling, which is why people so readily fall for the deception this world presents.

**Read** the above verses carefully, especially Jesus’ response. What does Jesus mean by linking together the verbs “worship” and “serve”? How are they related?

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All through the Old Testament, the concept of worshipping false gods and serving them is linked. “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to *worship* them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (*Deut. 4:19; see also Deut. 11:16, Ps. 97:7, Dan. 3:12*). Basically, you serve what you worship; hence, how important it is that you worship only the Lord.

Thus, we see a crucial point about worship. It is hard to imagine someone who worships the Lord in faith, in surrender, in humility and love and fear, at the same time serving other gods, whatever form they may come in. Worship, then, can be a protection for us against idolatry. The more we worship the Lord, even in our private devotion, the better protected we are against serving self, sin, and all the other forces vying for our service.

**Think about this idea more: what we worship is what we serve. How have you seen that principle manifested in your own life? How can your worship experience help you stay focused on serving only the Lord?**

## Worshipping What You Know Not

As we have seen numerous times, even with all the intricate and deep forms of worship that the Lord had instituted for Israel, it was not the forms alone that the Lord cared about. The forms and traditions and liturgy were all means to an end, and that end was a person surrendered in body and mind to his or her Creator and Redeemer. It is much easier, however, to make one's religion a series of formulas, traditions, and outward acts than it is to daily die to self and surrender in humility and faith to the Lord. This fact surely goes a long way in explaining why the Bible spends a lot of time dealing with those whose hearts aren't right with God, regardless of how "correct" their forms of worship are.

This, too, was a problem that Jesus dealt with when here in the flesh.

**Read** John 4:1–24. What important point about worship was Jesus making to the Samaritan woman in verse 21? Why was He pointing her away from specific places of worship?

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In pointing out some of her deepest secrets, Jesus got the woman's attention. He then used that moment to point her to something better than what she had. Jesus uses the powerful phrase "Woman, believe me" in order to show her that true worship went far beyond the outward forms and places of worship. "This mountain" was Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had built a temple. Of course, that would be what one would expect a Jew to say to a Samaritan.

But Jesus did not stop there. He included even Jerusalem, the site of the sacred temple that He, Himself, had picked. Thus, early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus was, in a very broad way, pointing to what He later came right out and said in reference to the temple, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (*Matt. 24:2*). In all this, Jesus was working to give the woman the "living water" (*John 4:10*), which is Himself. He wanted her to see that a personal relationship with her Creator and Redeemer was the foundation of worship, and certainly not the forms and traditions of her faith, which had deviated from the true religion of the Jews. His reference to Jerusalem (*John 4:21*), however, proved that He was pointing to something even beyond the system of sacrifice and worship that He Himself had created.

**In what ways can all the aspects of your worship experience help you deepen your relationship with God?**

## The True Worshipers

**“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).**

After pointing the Samaritan away from specific places of worship and then telling her of the superiority of the Jewish faith over hers, Jesus then tells the woman about “the true worshippers.” In verse 21, Jesus said that the hour “is coming” when people will not worship either in that mountain or in Jerusalem; in verse 23, however, He says that the hour “now is” that all true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, do not look to some past glory, and do not look to some future event. Rather, the time “now is” to give the Lord the worship He deserves, and through that worship, experience the love, the grace, and the salvation that He offers.

**Jesus** said that all true worshippers will “worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” What do these two elements represent, and how are we to apply this to our worship experience today? See also *Mark 7:6–9*.

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Jesus here is calling for a balanced form of worship: a worship that comes from the heart, that is sincere and deeply felt, that comes from the love and the fear of God. There is nothing wrong with emotions in worship; after all, our religion calls upon us to love God (*1 John 5:2, Mark 12:30*), and how can that be separated from emotions?

At the same time, God calls upon His true worshippers to worship Him “in truth.” God has revealed His will, His truth, His law—truth that we are expected to believe and obey. True worshippers will love God, and from that love seek to serve Him, obey Him, and do what is right. Yet, how can they know what is right without knowing the truth about faith, obedience, salvation, and so forth? The idea that beliefs do not matter, that only a sincere spirit matters, is misguided. It is only half of the equation. Correct beliefs do not save, but they will give us a greater understanding of the character of God, and that should make us love and serve Him all the more.

**Is your worship more spirit than truth, or more truth than spirit? How can you learn to incorporate and balance both these aspects of worship?**

## Worshipping at His Feet

Throughout the long years of Christian history, the church has been divided over the issue of Christ's divinity. Was He truly the eternal God, One with the Father since eternity? Or was He created later, a being who came into existence through the creative power of the Father?

Though early on in our own church, some confusion on this matter existed, Ellen G. White made it very clear years ago what her position was—a position that, as a church, we have fully accepted today:

“ ‘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*, p. 19.

**Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the deity of Christ?**

*Matt. 2:11, 4:10, 9:18, 20:20, Mark 7:7, Luke 24:52, John 9:38.*

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Jesus was very clear in His response to Satan (*Matt. 4:10*) that the Lord alone should be worshiped, which leads to the important point shown in the texts above: Christ never refused their worship. No example is given in the numerous times when people worshiped Him where He told them, Don't worship Me, point your worship only toward the Father. In fact, the opposite is the case.

**Read Luke 19:37–40. What does Jesus' response to the Pharisees say about His attitude toward those who worshiped Him?**

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The point here is to reiterate a theme seen all this quarter, which is how crucial it is that Jesus be the center and focus of all our worship. Every song, every prayer, every sermon, everything that we do should, in one way or another, ultimately direct our minds toward Christ, the incarnate God who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Worship that leaves us with a sense of awe, love, and reverence for our Lord is worship that is no doubt pleasing in His sight.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “God With Us,” pp. 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Not by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple are men brought into communion with heaven. Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. *This is true worship*. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189; emphasis supplied.

“One equal with God, acted as servant to His disciples. . . . He to whom every knee shall bow, He whom the angels of glory count it honor to serve, bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord.”—p. 649.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 The religious leaders of Christ’s day claimed to know the Scriptures but were oblivious to the greatest miracle in history, the birth of the Messiah. Meanwhile, the wise men of the East came looking for Him in the right place at the right time. What significance does this story hold for us today as Christians, and as a church? How can we avoid the mistakes of the people in Christ’s day, as we see the prophecies of the last days being fulfilled?
- 2 Talk about the deity of Christ, why that is so important to our faith and worship. What do we lose if we, in any way, make Christ anything other than fully God?
- 3 Think again about Mary and what must have been going through her mind at this incredible turn of events. Think how much she didn’t understand and how hard some of this might have been for her (being pregnant without ever knowing a man certainly must have been stressful). And yet, even amid all this, she was able to praise the Lord and worship Him, despite so many unanswered questions, so many troublesome thoughts, so many unknowns. How can we learn to do the same: to worship and praise the Lord amid times of uncertainty and unknowns? In fact, why might that be of all times the best time to be wholeheartedly in an attitude of worship?

## The Priest Who Helped the Adventists

Ernesto is a farmer and a community leader in central Philippines. He was a devoted member of his church. As he read the Bible, Ernesto discovered some things that didn't seem right. He learned that our bodies are the temple of God, yet his own priest smoked. Ernesto asked the priest about this, and the priest only responded, "Leave me alone." Dissatisfied, Ernesto went home.

A few days later, some Seventh-day Adventists asked Ernesto for permission to hold evangelistic meetings in the area. Ernesto agreed. The Adventists didn't have a sound system, so Ernesto offered his personal sound system. The Adventists thanked Ernesto and asked him to operate the sound system to be sure that it was properly cared for. Ernesto agreed. Ernesto attended the meetings and operated the sound system for the Adventists. He also invited others to attend the meetings as well.

The Adventist leader asked Ernesto to let his teenage children read the Bible texts at the meetings. Again Ernesto agreed, though some warned him it could be trouble. When the meetings ended, 25 people were baptized, including Ernesto, his wife, and two of their children. Ernesto learned to give Bible studies, and a year later he held another evangelistic series after which 14 people were baptized, including three more of his children.

The priest gave Bibles to his parishioners and told them to read the Bible so they would be prepared if Ernesto tried to beguile them away from their church. As some members read their new Bible, they noticed things. One woman asked, "The Bible says we shouldn't worship idols. Then why do we bow to statues?"

The priest answered, "You're right. The Bible forbids it. Adventists cannot be faulted for refusing to worship idols." Another asked why they eat pork when the Bible forbids it. The priest said, "We cannot fault those who refuse to eat pork."

A third member asked him, "We worship on Sunday, but I can't find Sunday mentioned in the whole Bible. Are the Adventists right to worship on Saturday?" The priest answered, "The Adventists are right to worship on Saturday, but our tradition is to worship on Sunday."

As a result of the priest's responses, several families studied the Bible with Ernesto, and eventually they were baptized into the Adventist Church.

Thanks to the priest's distribution of Bibles and his answers to his members' questions, more than fifty members of Ernesto's former church have become Seventh-day Adventists. Ernesto is teaching them how to give Bible studies so they can help their church grow.

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*ERNESTO ERAMES is a farmer and lay worker in central Philippines.*



# Worship in the Early Church



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 1:1–11, 2:14–41, 17:15–34, 18:1–16, 1 Corinthians 13.*

**Memory Text:** “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (*1 Corinthians 13:1, NIV*).

Soon after Christ returned to heaven, the early church began to expand and grow. At first, it almost was exclusively Jews who were accepting Jesus as the Messiah and coming into the ranks of believers. Indeed, at first, many of the believers thought that the gospel was only for the Jews, which showed how much they still had to learn.

At Pentecost, after Peter's preaching and altar call before a multitude of Jews (*Acts 2*), “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (*Acts 2:41*). This text alone shows the fallacy of the idea that all the Jews rejected Jesus.

Yet, we would be mistaken to look back on the early church as some sort of idyllic time of worship and praise. Though in a radically different context, the early church struggled with some of the same issues we struggle with today, issues that could and would impact everything about their faith, including worship.

This week we will take a look at a few instances from the early days of Christianity and some of the challenges the church faced as it grew, and we'll seek to learn from the good things and, also, from the bad.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.*

## Many “Proofs”

From a human perspective, Jesus’ earthly ministry did not look so successful. Though He had attracted a fairly popular following while alive, it did not catch on en masse. Many leaders rejected Him, and of course, the Romans crucified Him, causing His closest disciples to scatter and flee.

Things looked pretty bad until His resurrection and then Pentecost, when suddenly His followers found a new boldness to proclaim their crucified Master as the Messiah of Israel. It was only after the resurrection of Jesus, in fact, that the early church started to take off.

**Read** Acts 1:1–11. What important truths do we find here about the Second Coming, baptism, the Holy Spirit, and mission?

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**Look** especially at verses 3 and 6. What do they tell us about how much more truth the disciples had to learn?

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One of the most interesting parts of this section is verse 3, in which Luke states that Jesus presented them with many “proofs.” Some versions use the phrase “infallible proofs,” which is somewhat overstating the case. Another translation calls it “convincing proofs,” which is the less problematic translation. The point here is that the believers in Jesus were given powerful evidence, “proof” of Jesus as the Messiah. Considering the daunting task that He had called them to and all the opposition that they would face, they needed all the proof they could get. The good news is that the Lord will give us all the reasons we need for faith, all the reasons we need to believe in things that we do not fully understand. As we see in these texts, the disciples still did not fully understand the Lord’s intentions regarding the nation of Israel, even after all this time with Jesus. We need to learn to worship, praise, and obey the Lord, despite all that we do not understand.

**Think about the powerful evidence we have for our beliefs, on all the good reasons for the logic of our faith. Notice, too, the use of the word *faith*. What does faith imply? That is, what good reasons do you have for having faith, a belief in something that you do not fully understand?**

## The Preaching of the Word

A great part of the Protestant worship tradition has been the preaching of the Word. A sacred responsibility falls upon the one given the task to feed the sheep, to teach and to preach and to exhort and to encourage. Music, liturgy, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and foot washing all have their place, but, perhaps, nothing's more important than what is preached from the pulpit during the worship hour.

**Read** Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:14–41*). **How** are the important topics of Scripture, doctrine, prophecy, Christ, gospel, and salvation expressed by Peter, and why are these so essential in preaching?

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What an experience it must have been, hearing the fisherman Peter preach with such power and authority. His words did not show any kind of waffling, any kind of doubt, but rather revealed the Spirit working through Him. All through his homily, Peter never wavers, but using the Scriptures (then, only the Old Testament) he preaches with power the gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Messiah, who is now “ ‘exalted to the right hand of God’ ” (*Acts 2:33*). It is amazing how, in such a small number of sentences, he covers such an incredible amount of information, everything from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to repentance, to the Second Coming.

**What** were the results of the preaching at this worship service? *See Acts 2:41*. **What** can we take away from this for ourselves and our Sabbath services?

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No doubt, this must have been a very special worship service. Yet, at the same time, we have the same promises that they had. We have the same Bible (and now the New Testament, as well) that they had, and we have the same Lord who offers us the same Spirit. Why, then, shouldn't we have worship services with the kind of power we see here? What is holding us back?

## Paul on Mars Hill

In the days of the early church, we can see another example of the issue of worship, and of what people worship—this time in the ministry of the apostle Paul when he was in Athens, the place where three of the world’s most influential philosophers (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) once lived.

What a different audience Paul had to deal with here than Peter did years earlier before all those devout Jews in Jerusalem!

**Read** Acts 17:15–34, the account of Paul’s preaching in Athens. How different was Paul’s witness to these people from that of Peter’s to the audience on the Day of Pentecost?

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One of the most obvious differences is that, unlike Peter, Paul here does not quote the Bible. In fact, he quoted a pagan author instead. At the same time, notice how Paul appealed to logic and reason: look around at the created world, he was saying, and you will see powerful evidence of the Creator God. He was starting out, using a kind of natural theology and pointing to the natural world as a reason to believe in the Creator God.

It is interesting to note the issue of worship here. These people were worshipping something that they did not understand. Paul sought to take that devotion and worship and turn it away from idols and other vain things and toward the living God. Humans seem to have an innate need to worship something, anything, and Paul here seeks to point them to the only thing truly worthy of their worship.

**On** what point did some of these people have a real problem, and why?

In the end, appeals to logic and reason and natural theology can take us only so far. Paul, in his witness, then sought to teach them about repentance, judgment, and the resurrection, teachings that need to be taken on faith. Hence, he did not have that much success with them. Though he had a few converts, most seemed to have gone back to their worship of what is vain, useless, and unable to save.

**In what ways can our worship services be better able to reach out to those who do not have a biblical background, who do not start with the same premises we do? How can we make our worship services more seeker-friendly?**

## Worship “Contrary to the Law”

Worship is not just about what you do in church on Sabbath. Worship encompasses aspects of our whole faith: what we believe, what we proclaim, how we act. Central to worship is the idea of the Lord as our Creator and our Redeemer. Everything about worship should flow from this fundamental and sacred truth. Again, worship is primarily about God and the actions of God in history. Authentic worship should draw participants into a closer walk with their Lord. It should lead us to a sense of awe, reverence, repentance, and love for Him and for others.

Though we always should be thinking about the Lord (*Luke 21:36, Ps. 1:2*), worship time should be something special, something unique. We cannot, however, rely on the church itself or on the worship leaders themselves to provide that kind of experience for us, however much of a role they can play. In the end, it comes down to ourselves and the attitude we bring to church with us on Sabbath.

At the same time, as we have seen all quarter, worship is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Our worship does not save us; rather, our worship is one of our responses to being saved.

**Read Acts 18:1–16. What charge was laid against Paul, and what does that tell us about worship?**

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It is fascinating that Paul was charged with persuading people toward a different kind of worship, a worship “contrary to the law” (*vs. 13*). (Even the Jews who believed in Jesus at times leveled a similar accusation against Paul.) The point in Acts 18 is that these people were so caught up in tradition, so caught up in how things were done in the past, so caught up in the forms of worship, that when Paul presented them with the One who was the whole purpose of their worship, the One whom they worshiped without knowing it, the One whom all the worship services really pointed to—they rejected what he said. So caught up were they in the law itself, they missed the One to whom the law pointed.

Again, though our circumstances today are radically different from Paul’s back then, we need to be careful not to allow our forms and traditions to get in the way of what our faith really should be about. Any worship that does not lead us directly to the Cross is misguided.

## Love Conquers All

It is so easy, from our perspective today, to look back at the early church as some sort of model of harmony and peace, an example of what true worship was all about. Unfortunately, New Testament history is so similar to Old Testament history in that both show just how far fallen we all are.

Take, for example, the church in Corinth, which Paul established on his second missionary journey. A commercial hub, known for its luxury and wealth, Corinth was also a center of one of the most sensual and degrading religions of that era. Influenced by their culture, immorality and dissension had invaded the church. And yet, as bad as it was, it was not the only problem there. Paul addressed other issues that were causing factions to develop in the church, including idolatry (*1 Cor. 10:14*) and the seeming overemphasis of the gifts, especially the misuse of the gift of tongues for self-seeking motives (*1 Corinthians 14*).

**In the midst of his discourse to the Corinthians and all their problems, Paul gives them the famous chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. What is the essential message here? More important, how can we apply this to our lives and worship today?**

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Paul suggested that no profession we make, no mighty miracles, no charismatic gifts, and no piety or zeal will profit us unless there is a heart filled with love for God, confirmed by love for one another. That, says Paul, is the ultimate gift for which we should seek, which may not be substituted with anything less.

Spiritual gifts are helpful, and Christians should use their gifts to honor God and to build up the church in unity. But never should any spiritual gift be used for display of self, personal gain, or in a disorderly way in worship or otherwise.

In the end, a church filled with loving, dedicated Christians will exert an influence and power that extend far beyond the weekly worship service.

**How much does unselfish love for others impact your daily life? That is, how much of your own time and energy do you spend on seeking to minister to others? How much of self are you willing to renounce, all for the good of other people? It is not so easy, is it?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56; “Exalting the Cross,” pp. 201–210; “Corinth,” pp. 243–254; “Called to Reach a Higher Standard,” pp. 309–322, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; . . . it is walking by faith . . . it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51.

“What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ’s sake? It was union with God, . . . with the Holy Spirit, . . . with Christ. Reproach and persecution have separated many from earthly friends, but never from the love of Christ.”—p. 85.

“[These] consecrated messengers . . . allowed no thought of self-exaltation to mar their presentation of Christ. . . . They coveted neither authority nor pre-eminence.”—p. 209.

“By idolatry he [Paul] meant not only the worship of idols, but self-serving, love of ease, the gratification of appetite and passion.”—p. 317.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class talk about all the reasons we have for faith. What “proofs” do we have for what we believe? What rational and logical evidence do we have that helps affirm us in our beliefs? At the same time, what are the challenges to our faith? In the end, even despite these challenges, why do we believe what we do?
- 2 Think about some of the most powerful worship services you ever have attended. What made them so special, so powerful? What elements in particular made the difference? How could these elements be brought into your local church worship, if they are not there already?
- 3 What are some of the potential ways in which our worship services actually could impede our view of Christ and the Cross? How can we make sure that nothing is allowed to do that?
- 4 Dwell more on 1 Corinthians 13. What concrete steps could your church take to manifest the love that Paul talks about here?

## Making a Difference

Catherine didn't choose to study at the Adventist University at Cosendai in Cameroon. Her brother, an Adventist pastor, urged her to study there. Even though the university was just developing and still lacked many of the resources of more established schools, Catherine's parents gave their permission too. They had seen the difference the Adventist faith had made in Catherine's brother's life.

When Catherine's friends learned that she was planning to study at an Adventist university, they warned her not to go, not to join the Adventist Church. "We won't be your friends if you become an Adventist," they threatened.

Catherine resisted the Adventist influence, even though she attended worship and chapel services several times a week, sat through countless classes that began with prayer, and studied the Bible in her religion classes. She made friends with other students and noticed the difference in the lives of the Adventist students. The impact of daily prayers and frequent conversations about faith and God challenged her thinking. "I couldn't help but think about God," she says. She began feeling God draw her to Himself.

Her non-Adventist friends urged her not to give in to the religious influence at the school. "You can be a Christian without being an Adventist," one friend said. Others urged her to remain faithful to her family's religion. Catherine had resisted God's call as long as she could. But the call of God was stronger, and at the end of a Week of Prayer Catherine took her stand to follow Jesus.

"I hope that the way God has changed my life will draw my friends to Jesus," she says. "I'm not a preacher, and I don't want to force them to follow my example. I just want them to see the difference Jesus is making in my life and consider asking Jesus to change their lives too."

"The Adventist University in Cameroon may not be fancy, but it has made a huge difference in my life. I have received far more than a degree here; I will have found Christ as my Lord and Savior."

This quarter the Adventist University at Cosendai will receive part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help build its new campus. Your special offering will help grow this university, and your weekly mission offerings will help people in Cameroon and around the world build believers for eternity.

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*CATHERINE LIGO is a graduate of the Adventist University at Cosendai, where she majored in business administration.*



# Worship in the Book of Revelation



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 1:13–18, Job 42:1–6, Rev. 19:1–5, Revelation 13, 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth” (*Revelation 14:3*).

Few books of the Bible hold as much mystery and fascination as does Revelation. It is filled with incredible images of beasts and dragons and fire and earthquakes and plagues and armies and fogs and cities and falling stars and so forth.

And yet, amid all the drama, the theme that repeatedly appears is worship. Whether dealing with the final crisis regarding those who worship the beast and its image, or revealing beings in heaven who sing praises to God, Revelation comes back again and again to worship: worship of Him who “liveth for ever and ever” (*Rev. 5:14*), worship of Him “which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou has taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned” (*Rev. 11:17*), and worship of the One who is to receive “glory and honour and power” (*Rev. 4:11*).

In short, Revelation reveals what we have been looking at all quarter: that the Lord alone, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Judge—is worthy of our worship and praise.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 24.*

## “I Fell at His Feet as Dead”

Perhaps one of the greatest revelations we have been given of the majesty and power of God has come to us through astronomy. Most of the ancients had no idea of the size and expanse of the cosmos. In the twentieth century, with the incredible advances in various telescopes, we have been given a view of the universe that would have baffled most of the ancients. Indeed, we ourselves are baffled by it, by the size, by the distances, and by the incredible number of galaxies and stars. We barely can wrap our minds around it all.

And here is the amazing thing: only something greater than the cosmos could have created the cosmos, in the same way that only something greater than a painting could have created the painting. Thus, the God whom we worship, the God whom we serve, is the Creator of the universe; hence, He is greater than it all.

Who, then, are we in contrast to such a God?

**Read** Revelation 1:13–18, John’s depiction of Jesus, as revealed to him there. What is his reaction, and why would he react that way? How is the Cross presented here?

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**Read** Job 42:1–6. How does Job’s reaction compare with John’s?

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Though both these men were given only a partial revelation of the Lord, what they saw was enough to greatly humble them. There was fear, reverence, awe, and a sense of repentance in their reactions. How could there not be? They were getting a view of the Creator of the universe; more so, they were sinful beings getting a view of a sinless and holy God. No doubt, a realization of their own sinfulness, their own unrighteousness, their own filth, rose up in them before the presence of the Lord.

**How should our worship services elicit in us a similar reaction? That is, shouldn’t we be given a sense of the presence of God, which should humble us? At the same time, how crucial that the Cross be lifted up before us as our only hope of salvation.**

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## Holy, Holy, Holy . . .

Though the book of Revelation still holds many mysteries, the dominant motif comes through time and time again, and that is, of worship. All through Revelation are scenes of various beings worshipping the Lord.

**Read** the following texts. What can we learn about worship from what appears in them? What themes appear here that we have seen throughout this quarter?

*Rev. 4:8–11* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 5:8–14* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 7:9–12* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 11:15–19* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 15:1–4* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rev. 19:1–5* \_\_\_\_\_

Among all the things that Revelation can teach us, one thing should stand out: what happens on earth impacts heaven, and what happens in heaven impacts earth. Heaven and earth are, as we have been told, closer than we might think. Revelation shows us just how close. Indeed, time and again the beings in heaven are worshipping God for what He has done on earth.

What, too, are the themes of praise and worship seen here but themes we have been looking at all quarter? The Lord as Creator, the Lord as Redeemer, the Lord as Judge. He is praised for His holiness, He is praised for the shedding of His blood, He is praised and worshiped for His power, for His might, and for His honor. He is praised for His justice and judgment and for the salvation He offers.

**Think again through the plan of salvation, of what it means and what God has given us through it. Don't we have so much to praise Him for? Whatever your struggles, whatever your trials, take time every day to praise the Lord for all that you have to be thankful about. It will change your life.**

## Revelation 13

From the introduction onward, we have seen how the final end-time crisis will center on the question of worship. The issue of worship is not a small matter. The eternal destiny of souls hangs on it. This crucial truth becomes more apparent in what unfolds in Revelation 13 and 14.

### **Read** Revelation 13 and answer the following questions:

1. What is the historical context of these verses? What are they talking about historically and prophetically?

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2. How often does the theme of worship appear in this chapter? What does that tell us about how central it is?

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3. Where is the gospel, the salvation offered to us in Christ, presented in this chapter?

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From the beginning of the great controversy, Satan sought to subvert the authority and power of God. The battle that he started in heaven is now being played out on the earth. This chapter shows the enemy's work through history, through the powers presented there, and how it will climax in the final crisis surrounding the issue of worship: all those who do not worship the beast and his image will face economic and physical persecution. Even though Satan knows that he is defeated, even though, at the Cross it was over for him, he still continues to fight, still continues to seek deceiving as many as he can, and he will do so right up to the end.

Yet, in the midst of all this, we have Revelation 13:8, which refers to Jesus as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”; that is, even before all this began on earth, the “everlasting covenant” (*Heb. 13:20*) had been in place, offering all humans the opportunity for salvation. Those who truly have accepted that salvation, whose names are in the book of life, shall not worship the beast or his image. They are worshipping, instead, the One who “washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5), and we will no doubt be doing the same, worshipping Him, in heaven, as well.

## Revelation 14

Revelation 14 opens with what? A heavenly scene, showing the 144,000 who were “redeemed from the earth” (vs. 3). It starts out with a vision of the future, of what it will be like, at least for this group, when they stand before God in heaven. And though the text doesn’t come right out and say it, this certainly seems to be a depiction of some sort of heavenly worship.

Thus, Revelation 14 continues the theme of worship found in chapter 13. These people didn’t worship the beast and his image but instead are seen worshipping their Lord in heaven.

The chapter then returns to earth, picking up where chapter 13 left off, where those who worshiped the beast and his image were shown in contrast to those who would not, those whose names were written in the book of life.

**Read Revelation 14:6–12. Why are these texts so central, so crucial to us as Seventh-day Adventists? What themes appear here that we have been looking at all quarter? Why do we call these verses “present truth”?**

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These verses are rich and ripe with truth: Creation, Redemption, judgment, salvation, the gospel, obedience, faith, the Ten Commandments, and mission. Here, too, we can see the fiercest warning in all the Bible, and it centers on the question of worship: “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (*Rev. 14:11*).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand how central to this whole issue the seventh-day Sabbath is, which is so tied in with Creation and with worship. We worship the Lord because He is the Creator, and the Sabbath has been and still remains the foundational mark, or sign, of His role as Creator.

Though we still do not know when, and how, these issues will be brought to the forefront, we can be sure that they will. How crucial it is, then, that we be ready, not only to stand firm for the truth but also to be able “to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

## Worship God

“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (*Rev. 22:8, 9*). Read the context of these two verses. What’s the essential message here about worship?

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All quarter we have seen the same thing: humans have this innate need to worship. Even good things. Here John wants to worship the heavenly messenger who has revealed to him so much incredible truth. And yet, he is told to stop and worship God.

This is not the first time he has had this experience. In Revelation 19:10, he is about to do the same thing, and again, he is stopped and told to worship the Lord. It reminds one of Christ’s words to Satan: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (*Matt. 4:10*).

In both cases, too, John fell at the feet of the object he sought to worship, a symbol of surrender, of submission, and of reverence before the object of worship. Anything else is not really worship, is it?

And that is because worship is not merely about what we do on Sabbath for a few hours each week. Worship is about falling at the feet of our Lord all the time. It is about our entire attitude and relationship to God. Worship is what we should be doing 24/7; it is about living a life of faith, of obedience, and of surrender to the Lord. Worship is about putting God first and foremost in all that we say, all that we do, and all that we think. Worship is how we treat others, how we treat those we love, and those who are hard to love. Worship is about obeying the commandments, it is about ministering to those in need, it is about dying to self and proclaiming the gospel.

Again, think about Creation, think about the God who created the creation. Then think about the Cross, about the Creator dying for the sins of those whom He had created, bearing in Himself the punishment that they deserved in order that these undeserving beings could have the chance of being re-created in a new heaven and a new earth.

Because God created all that exists, anything else we worship is simply our worshipping more creation, worshipping idols of one form or another, worshipping what cannot save us. In contrast, with the image of the Creator on the cross, the question is, why would we want to worship anything or anyone else?

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Impending Conflict,” pp. 582–592; “The Final Warning,” pp. 603–612, “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 662–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Worship is bending low before our Maker, recognizing and acknowledging His holiness and our creatureliness. It is submitting to His sovereignty, responding to His majestic presence.”—Richard M. Davidson, Andrews University, *Worship in the Old Testament* (used by permission of the author), p. 3.

“The Psalmist states: ‘Serve the Lord with fear [awe]; rejoice with trembling’ (Ps. 2:11). In worship we recognize the awesome majesty and infinite power of the King; we remember that ‘Our God is a consuming fire’ (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29) that would instantly consume us if it were not for the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus who was ‘consumed’ on the altar of Calvary in our place.

“Thus our worship will keep a balance between joy and awe. It will be a holy joy. . . . Our worship must have awesome depth . . . yet vibrant joy.”—p. 30.

“The redeemed raise a song of praise that echoes and re-echoes through the vaults of heaven: ‘Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb,’ verse 10 [of Revelation 7]. . . .

“In all that shining throned there are none to ascribe salvation to themselves, as if they had prevailed by their own power and goodness. Nothing is said of what they have done or suffered; but the burden of every song, the keynote of every anthem, is: Salvation to our God and unto the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 665.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss in more detail the plan of redemption, the miracle of the Incarnation, the sinless life of Jesus, His death on our behalf, and the promise of His second coming. Why does all this make Christ so worthy of worship?
- ❷ What are ways that we worship the Lord when we are not in church service? If we are not worshipping the Lord all the time, can we truly worship him for a few hours on Sabbath? Discuss your answer.
- ❸ What are some good things that we could be in danger of worshipping?

# God's Gentle Nudges

by ARMINDO CACHIAIA

No one event, no single person led me to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But as I look back, I realize that God was nudging me in that direction since I was a child.

When I first heard that some people worship on the Sabbath, I wondered why anyone would worship on Saturday instead of Sunday. Then a classmate saw me reading a small booklet that featured the Ten Commandments on the cover. He told me that the Ten Commandments, including the fourth one, were still binding on God's people. I didn't pay too much attention at that time, but years later I remembered this.

When I finished school and married, my wife and I joined a Protestant church. An Adventist man I knew spoke to me of the Sabbath, and again I wondered about it. But mounting leadership assignments in church kept me too busy to think about the Sabbath.

Then God put the question of the Sabbath in my mind again. It bothered me. I realized that I had to answer this question once and for all. When I met Adventists in my travels, I asked them about the Sabbath. They answered with conviction and quoted Bible texts to back up what they said.

I became busier and busier in my church, but the Sabbath question never went away. Finally I resigned my positions in my church and decided to visit an Adventist church to learn for myself whether the Sabbath was really God's holy day.

My wife refused to go with me, but I went anyway. The church wasn't perfect; the people weren't perfect. But I knew I was hearing Bible truth, and I felt I had found my spiritual home. My 14-year-old son went with me, and we began studying the Bible together. Soon both of us were convinced. I continued to invite my wife, and after five months she agreed to go. My son and I were baptized, and later my wife joined us.

I know that God led us to His truth by gently nudging me over the years. I'm a local elder now, and I'm helping to plant another company of believers in the area. My wife and son are also active members. I'm overjoyed that as a result of my conversion some members of my former church are asking questions about what Adventists believe. Others are attending the Adventist church, and some have joined the church.

Our mission offerings help provide materials to teach honest-hearted people about God. But sometimes God nudges us toward His truths. For that I'm grateful.

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ARMINDO CACHIAIA is a businessman in Huambo, Angola.



Paul's letter to the Galatians has been compared to spiritual dynamite, and rightly so. Along with Romans, no other book in the Bible has sparked as much revival and reformation. What is it about Galatians that has made it such a backbone of spiritual revival? Unlike any other book in the Bible, Galatians addresses a number of themes crucial to the Christian soul. It tackles issues such as freedom, the role of the law in salvation, our condition in Christ, and the nature of the spirit-led life.

Next quarter's Bible study guide, *The Gospel in Galatians* by Carl Cosaert, invites us to journey with the apostle Paul as he pleads with the Galatians to remain true to Jesus and gives us a chance to reflect on our own understanding of the gospel. It is our hope that God's Spirit will spark a spiritual revival in our hearts as we rediscover what God has done for us in Christ.

## Lesson 1—Apostle to the Gentiles

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Persecutor of the Christians** (*Acts 7:58*)

MONDAY: **Saul's Conversion** (*Acts 9:5*)

TUESDAY: **Saul in Damascus** (*Acts 9:10–14*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles** (*Acts 11:19–21, 26*)

THURSDAY: **Conflict Within the Church** (*Acts 10:1–11:18*)

### Memory Text—*Acts 11:18*

**Sabbath Gem:** God had far different plans for Saul, plans that Saul never could have anticipated for himself. Not only would this persecutor of the Christians become one himself and preach Jesus as the Messiah, but he would preach this message among the Gentiles.

## Lesson 2—Paul's Authority and Gospel

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Paul, the Letter Writer** (*2 Peter 3:15, 16*)

MONDAY: **Paul's Calling** (*Gal. 1:1, 2*)

TUESDAY: **Paul's Gospel** (*Gal. 1:3–5*)

WEDNESDAY: **No Other Gospel** (*Gal. 1:6–9, 5:12*)

THURSDAY: **The Origin of Paul's Gospel** (*Gal. 1:11–24*)

### Memory Text—*Galatians 1:10*

**Sabbath Gem:** Paul's teaching that the Gentiles could become Christians on the basis of faith alone was under attack by false teachers who insisted that they first needed to be circumcised. Paul considered this an attack on the very essence of the gospel itself.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.