

# Conformity,<sup>1</sup> Compromise,<sup>2</sup> and Crisis<sup>3</sup> in Worship



## SABBATH—AUGUST 13

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Genesis 6:5; Deuteronomy 12:8; Deuteronomy 13:18; 1 Kings 11:1–13; 1 Kings 18; Jeremiah 17:5; Malachi 3:16–4:6.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Solid food is for those who are grown up. They have trained themselves with a lot of practice. They can tell the difference between good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14, NIV).

**IN 1954, A WRITER OF NOVELS NAMED WILLIAM GOLDING** wrote *The Lord of the Flies*. The book tells an imaginary story about a group of English children. After a plane crash the children get stuck on an island on which no one lives. Golding uses this story as a modern parable about how humans are naturally evil. What makes the story so powerful is that he uses children. Children are supposed to be innocent. But the children in the story become evil and rebellious (cannot be controlled) anyway. Golding showed how evil people are at heart.

Christians probably would say, “So tell us something we do not know.” Human evil and sinfulness are very much a part of the Christian message. The Bible is clear on that point. And most people agree that evil is bad. But they cannot agree on the answer to the question, What is evil?

This week, as we continue to study worship, we are going to focus on (give attention to) a certain kind of evil. A kind of evil that has brought terrible results to God's people and to all people in general. We can read about what this evil did to old-time Israel. But we need to ask the important question about just how easily we give in to this evil ourselves.

1. conformity—trying to be like the people of the world.

2. compromise—giving up religious principles (important rules) to be like the people of the world.

3. crisis—a very serious problem in the church.

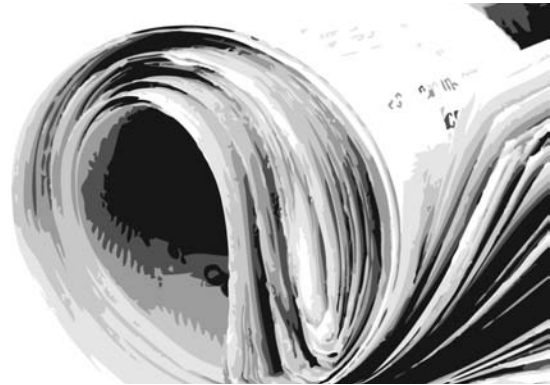
SUNDAY—AUGUST 14

IN DIFFERENT EYES (Genesis 6:5)

**What one point do Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; John 2:25; and Romans 3:9–12 have in common? Why is it important for us always to remember this point? What kind of things in your culture could cause you to forget this important truth?**

All through the Bible, we are warned: the human heart plays tricks on us. People are evil. Do not follow others. No one is safe from evil. There is only one exception. This is Jesus. Jesus never sinned. Very few people in the Bible are pictured as being examples of such true goodness.

One does not need the Bible to know just how evil humans are. History tells us how evil humans are. Newspapers and the daily news tell us how evil humans are. Our homes, and, at times, our own hearts should be enough to tell us how evil humans are. What should be scary for us to remember is that a perfect angel, as Lucifer<sup>4</sup> originally was, could choose evil, even in the perfect place of heaven. If other perfect humans, such as Adam and Eve, could choose evil, even in Eden, then what about us? We are born with sinful natures.<sup>5</sup> And we carry those natures with us into a sinful world. No wonder evil comes so easily to us. It is implanted in our genes.<sup>6</sup>



History, newspapers, and our own hearts, at times, tell us how evil people can be.

But we have to be careful in our understanding of what “evil” is. Some things are so clearly evil, so clearly bad, that anyone would judge them as evil. But evil can be much more hidden. Things that the world or our culture and our society might think of as normal could be wrong, sinful, even evil, according to the Bible.

**Judge the difference between Deuteronomy 12:8 and Deuteronomy 13:18. What important difference is being made here? Why is this difference important for us to understand?**

**What are some of the things that your own society does not judge as evil but the Bible does? More important, how much has the world influenced you and the church about these issues? What things are judged by the Bible as evil, things that the church takes too lightly because of the influence of society? Bring your**

4. Lucifer—another name for “the enemy” Satan.

5. sinful natures—any of the fallen qualities or aspects that we as humans are born with. Without God, our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, and so on.

6. genes—the parts of a cell that control or influence the appearance, growth, and so forth, of a living thing.

answer to class on Sabbath.

## MONDAY—AUGUST 15

### THE ART (AND EVIL) OF COMPROMISE (1 Kings 11:1–13)

Politics is the art of compromise. In this case the word *art* is very important. This is because compromise can be a very subtle (having fine and deeper shades of meaning) action on the part of the person doing it. A good politician is someone who can get people to change their minds about something. And the people often do not even know that they are doing just that! In this light, then, there is no doubt that Satan is the best politician around.

All through the Bible, we find examples of the evil of compromise. Not every compromise is evil. In a way, life itself is a kind of compromise. But compromise becomes another example of human evil when those who should know better fall away from the truth that God has given them.

**Read 1 Kings 11:1–13 and describe what happened here. How did this happen? What was it about Solomon that made his actions here so bad? How did this backsliding (falling back into sin) influence the worship, faith, and the whole religious system of Israel? Also, what lessons can we learn for ourselves today from this story about the dangers of compromise?**

Perhaps the most telling part from these verses is the sentence saying

“as Solomon grew older, his wives turned his heart toward other gods” (1 Kings 11:4, NIV). In other words, it did not happen suddenly. Solomon, the faithful and godly man, did not suddenly turn away from the Lord. Instead, he changed bit by bit. Over time a little compromise here led to a little there. Each step took him farther and farther from where he should have been. At last he was doing something that he would not have done when he was younger.

Consider, too, what Solomon’s compromises did to worship in Israel. They had a negative influence that would last for many, many years.

**Every now and then you hear stories about people who left the Seventh-day Adventist Church for years and came back. They then were shocked by some of the changes that they saw in areas such as doctrines (beliefs), standards, and worship. Change might not be bad in every case. But it might be bad in some cases. How can we know the difference?**



Each step of compromise took Solomon farther and farther from where he should have been.

**TUESDAY—AUGUST 16****COUNTERFEIT WORSHIP  
(1 Kings 12:25–27)**

In 1 Kings 11, Ahijah, the prophet,<sup>7</sup> came to Jeroboam, King Solomon's servant, with a message that he would become king over ten of the tribes of Israel (verses 26–31). But the prophet made it clear to Jeroboam that his success would depend on his faithfulness to God's commandments (verses 37, 38).

Sadly, Jeroboam listened only to what he wanted to hear. And he forgot what he needed to do for success. He was all too ready to lead in the rebellion (1 Kings 12:16–20). Almost right away Jeroboam took steps to prevent his people from returning to Jerusalem to worship.

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

Jeroboam tried to start a false religion that would separate Israel from the worship of the true God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25–33). Notice how this new false worship was nearly the same as the worship of the true God. But at the same time the false worship did not follow most of the

advice of Yahweh (God). Instead, it

1. offered sacrifices and authorized (gave power to) non-Levite priests (verses 31–33),
2. made calves of gold to worship (verse 28),
3. made Bethel a place of worship (verse 29),
4. made Dan a place of worship (verse 29),
5. started a new feast to take the place of the Feast of Tabernacles<sup>8</sup> (verse 32),
6. built shrines (sacred places) on high places (verse 31).

False money cannot fool people if it does not look the same as real money. Jeroboam knew that his false worship must have many of the same parts of worship that the people were used to. But he later announced, pointing to the golden calves, “ ‘Here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt!’ ” (verse 28, NIV).

**It is so easy for us today to look back and think, How could they have fallen into such obvious (clear) backsliding? But humans have a wonderful ability to deceive (fool) themselves (it is all part of our sinful nature). We deceive ourselves if we think that we are not just as easily fooled as they were back then. Consider yourself, your lifestyle, your way of worship.**

7. prophet—a man or woman who is a spokesperson for God. God gives a prophet special messages to give to His people. A prophet also speaks to God on behalf of His people. God may also give a prophet warnings about what will happen in the future.

8. Feast of Tabernacles—a time of joy that celebrated the harvest or the gathering in of the grain, olives, and grapes at the end of the year. The word *tabernacles* refers to the booths made of branches that people lived in during the feast. This practice was a way for the children of Israel to remember how their people once wandered in the wilderness before they had homes to live in.

**What might you be doing that is not much different from what happened in Jeroboam's time? How willing are you to make changes if necessary?**

**WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 17**

**ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL<sup>9</sup> (1 Kings 18)**

Things went from bad to worse in the north (the northern kingdom of Israel) in connection with worship under the rule of Ahab and Jezebel (read 1 Kings 17–19). Now we come to the famous story of the challenge between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. This is where we can notice just how far compromise had taken them.

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

It must have been quite a scene, these prophets of Baal shouting, leaping, and crying. (Who knows what kind of music they might have played during their service?) They were prophesying,<sup>10</sup> cutting themselves, and spilling their own blood as part of their worship of Baal. They were certainly very excited about their faith and their god. Their emotions (deep feelings) showed how sincere they felt about their beliefs.

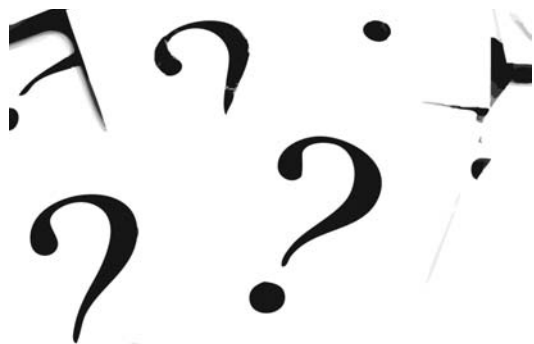
Today, too, some Christian worship services could remind a person at times of something like this: a lot of emotion, a lot of excitement, and a lot of noise. Yes, we want to avoid worship services that remind people of funerals. But, at the same time, we do not want worship services that remind them of priests of Baal at Mount Carmel. Some seem to think the more noise they make, the better the worship service is. But that is not what worship is about.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from this story is that all worship must point to the true Lord, to the Creator. True worship needs to follow the Word of God (Bible). It needs to point the worshiper to the Lord and all His work in history. The priests of Baal were the ones who made all the big noise. But Elijah prayed a simple prayer, “ ‘Answer me. Lord, answer me. Then these people will know that you are the one and only God’ ” (verse 37, NIV). This was no “Elijah show.” It was about worshiping the true God instead of any and all false ones, no matter who they were.

Our worship services should always make worshipers think of the question that Elijah asked Israel: “ ‘How long will it take you to make up your minds? If the Lord is the one and only God, follow him. But if Baal is the one and only God, follow him’ ” (verse 21, NIV). Our worship experience should force us to look inside our hearts. In this way we will know where our true love is: with the Lord or with anything else.

9. Baal—worshiped by the Canaanites as the god of storms and thunder; in some places, Baal was worshiped as the god of the sun.

10. prophesying—giving special messages from a god or telling what will happen in the future.



All of us must answer the question that Elijah asked, “How long will you take to make up your minds? If the Lord is God, follow Him. But if Baal is god, follow him.”

**THURSDAY—AUGUST 18**

**THE ELIJAH MESSAGE  
(Malachi 3:18)**

Elijah’s challenge with the 150 prophets on Mount Carmel came down to one question for the people gathered there with them, “ ‘How long will it take you to make up your minds? If the Lord is the one and only God, follow him. But if Baal is the one and only god, follow him’ ” (1 Kings 18:21, Nlrv). Yes, that question was asked in this story. But it really is a question that each person must answer for herself or himself: do I worship and follow the true God or not? Each of us might be able to “put off making up our minds” 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 (war between Christ and Satan) is over, all people will have been forever divided into one of two groups: “between those who serve me [God] and those who do not” (Malachi

3:18, Nlrv). As Jesus so boldly and clearly said, “ ‘Anyone who is not with me is against me. Anyone who does not gather sheep with me scatters them’ ” (Luke 11:23, Nlrv). How much clearer could Jesus be?

**With the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel in mind, read Malachi 3:16–4:6. What is the Lord telling us? How do we understand this “Elijah message” in comparison with last-day events and the whole question of worship? Read also Revelation 14:7–12 to help you with your answer.**

Jesus spoke of John the Baptist as “Elijah” (Matthew 17:11–13). John the Baptist, too, had a message of change, repentance,<sup>11</sup> and obedience. Malachi makes it clear (Malachi 4:1, 5) that “Elijah” will again come just before the end of sin and evil. The book of Revelation preaches to the last generation a message of warning, a call to obedience, and a call to worship the Creator God. As with Elijah on Mount Carmel, people will have to make the most important choice of their lives. This is a choice that is filled with truly eternal results. But here is the good news. Even before these final events happen, we can make daily choices that will get us ready to be on the Lord’s side when the great battle between good and evil unfolds among the nations.

**Think about the daily choices you make, even about the smallest of things (read Luke 16:10). Judging**

11. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

by those choices, which of the two sides are you choosing? Think about the possible results of your answer.



We can make good choices each day to help us to be on the Lord's side in the great battle between good and evil.

### FRIDAY—AUGUST 19

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “Jeroboam,” pages 99–108; “National Apostasy,”<sup>12</sup> pages 114–116; “Elijah the Tishbite,” pages 119–128; “The Voice of Stern [Strong] Rebuke [Scolding],” pages 139–142; “Carmel,” pages 143–154, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The backsliding going on today is very much the same as the backsliding that had spread all over Israel in Elijah’s time.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 170.

“God has many thousands [in this age] who have not bowed the knee to Baal . . . [and] many who have been worshiping Baal unknowingly. But the Spirit of God is still working on them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 171.

A. W. Tozer was a well-known preacher of the twentieth century (he died in 1963). He often preached against the worship of the “god of entertainment [good times].” He suggested that no matter how hard they try, churches cannot compete

with the world’s idea of entertainment. But it is the cross of Jesus Christ, says Tozer, not entertainment, that will win souls to Christ. Read A. W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment*, compiled (collected in one book) by James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Wing Spread Publishers, 1997), pages 108, 109.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In class, discuss your answer to Sunday’s question. How much has your society influenced the church’s views on the moral (right and wrong) issues of the day?

② The descriptions of Baal worship suggest that it was highly entertaining. This could help to explain why it was popular. How can we restore (bring back) the idea of deep respect for God in our worship without expecting to be 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? How has it not changed? 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 twenty years from now.

④ Think about how much the nation of Israel fell into backsliding. Again, none of this happened overnight. The devil is patient. How can we protect ourselves and the church from slowly but surely going the same way as Israel?

12. apostasy—turning completely away from God.