

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



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?**

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?

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?

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*.

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?

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.*

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?

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?
- ❹ 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.

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