

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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

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

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?

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.