

Happy Are You, O Israel!



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 where individuality is the focus, 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 to 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?

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 5:20, 21*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize the differences between self-centered worship and God-centered worship.

Feel: Foster attitudes of submission and obedience in worship.

Do: Submit to God's will and ways rather than substitute his or her own ideas and methods for His requirements.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God-Centered Worship

A Why is it important to recognize God's distinctions between sacred and common?

B What scriptural examples describe the consequences of substituting our own ways and means of worship for God's requirements?

C Why were the drastic measures that God took with Nadab and Abihu so important at this juncture in the development of Israel's concepts of worship?

D Why did God reject Saul's leadership and take the kingdom away from him?

II. Feel: Obedience Rather Than Sacrifice

A How was Hannah's attitude in worship different from Saul's? (*See 1 Samuel 1 and 1 Samuel 15.*)

B How were Nadab and Abihu's attitudes toward worship similar to Saul's? (*See 1 Samuel 15 and Leviticus 10.*)

C What attitudes are important to foster in worship, and why?

III. Do: Not My Will, But Thine

A In what situation do we find the greatest temptation to do our own thing, rather than submit to God's direction?

B What should we do to focus on God rather than on ourselves during worship?

► **Summary:** When they followed God's explicit directions in worship, Israel was rewarded with His presence. Those who substituted their own ways and means for what God required met with grave consequences.

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 into 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 the way in which they died? What important gospel lesson can we learn from this tragic story?**

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 in favor of 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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God is not an imaginary being whom we can shape according to our whims and opinions. There is a dynamic, fulfilling way to worship and serve God, and a self-serving way. When we worship, let us always put God before our whims and ingrained opinions.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the fact that loving God means to show that love through obedience, a desire to please Him, and a will to find out what that love entails.

We've all probably had experiences in which our opinions or preferences were treated as though they were unimportant. Have you ever, for example, been asked what you wanted for your birthday or for Christmas, only to receive something for which you did not ask or something that was clearly chosen because the individual didn't want to take the time or trouble? How did you feel then? Clearly it was the thought that counted, and there wasn't any. How much worse is it when it comes from someone who claims to love and/or respect you?

Over the previous weeks we've been exploring the meaning of true worship, worship that proceeds from a heart truly dedicated to God and from the desire to learn and do His will. But how often do we ignore what He wants from us and merely give Him what we think He should have or what we're willing to part with? God wants our heart, soul, mind, and obedience. Nothing less will do.

Consider This: How can you show your love for God through obedience?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the fact that to love God means to reject that which doesn't please Him. On a more positive note, pleasing God should be more important to us than anything else, even worldly success.

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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 to 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?

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 to 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. Isaiah and the Sliding Scale of Values** (*Review Isaiah 5:18–23 with your class.*)

It has been said that reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away. Most of us are quite willing to adhere to this idea when it concerns oncoming buses, poison mushrooms, and venomous snakes. Reclassifying a venomous snake as a nonvenomous snake is unlikely to make any difference to the victim of the snake's bite. There is also little debate on what is bitter or sweet, allowing for some cultural differences. For example, the Chinese regard the taste of tea as sweet, while many Westerners regard it as bitter. But still, the reaction to tastes perceived as bitter is immediate and completely bypasses the smart-alecky, "rational" faculties. And no one is a relativist in pitch darkness, especially when offered a flashlight.

So, in practice, there is little or no debate about sweetness versus bitterness or darkness versus light. What about good and evil, right and wrong? Most of us have a scale, with some horrible dictator at the far end of evil and possibly someone like Mother Teresa at the opposite end. But within that paradigm we tend to operate on the basis of a sliding scale, particularly if "everybody does it" or, even more so, if we or those in our social circle are doing it. We know right from wrong, but maybe it's only a little wrong. If we ourselves aren't doing it—whatever "it" is—perhaps we feel particularly enlightened and compassionate for excusing or ignoring it.

In this passage Isaiah cuts right to the heart of the matter. Woe to those who call good evil, and evil good, a distinction that should be as real and important to us as darkness versus light. Notice that he doesn't mention people who do evil in this passage at all. He takes on people who excuse evil, or who refuse to acknowledge that good and evil exist.

Consider This: Where do your standards—for worship or life itself—come from? Why is it important that they be God-based instead of based on what others do and think is right, or at least what they think is "not too bad"?

II. Obedience Is More Important Than Results (*Review Numbers 20:8–12 with your class.*)

Many Bible readers and students have wondered why God's punishment

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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?

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

of Moses in the sequence of events recorded in this passage was so harsh. Moses was a dedicated leader of an often petulant and recalcitrant people. He faced adversities and terrors that would have sent a lesser man screaming into the night, never to return. And after all this, these very same people, whom he had led and provided for, accused him of not knowing what he was doing and of taking them on an aimless death march. So, Moses got angry and struck the rock rather than speaking to it. So what?

And anyway, it *worked*. Water came out of the rock, just as it would have if Moses had followed instructions to the letter. But we also don't read much about murmuring or dissent from the people in the following passages. Moses shut them up. What could be better?

What this outcome demonstrates is that God can bring positive results even out of our errors or disobedience. He is merciful and sees the long view. What this doesn't mean, however, is that we should allow ourselves to be tugged along by our whims and moods—whether in life, ministry, or worship—doing whatever seems right at the moment, without regard for what is best in God's eyes. God will allow us to achieve results in spite of our ignorance or failures, but He expects us to learn as our minds become more like His. Moses spoke to God face to face. We are to seek out not merely what is adequate for achieving our goals but the good and perfect will of God in all matters.

Consider This: As God blesses us and gives us more complete knowledge of His will and character, He expects more from us. If we say we want to know God and His will, how are we to pattern our lives after it?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions and exercises to emphasize the need to claim Christ's robe of righteousness in order to be reconciled to God.

Thought Questions:

1 In Deuteronomy 33:5, 26, Moses refers to the Israelite people as "upright," literally "righteous" (*Yeshurun* in Hebrew). But we know from the history recorded that they often behaved in a way that didn't seem righteous at all. Moses, of all people, would have had reason to know that. Why, then, did he refer to them as righteous? What does this suggest about the way in which God sees us or about what we could be?

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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? Against what does it warn us? How can we make sure that we are not guilty of exactly what these verses warn us about?

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 His 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 to 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 of 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Our natural tendency as humans is to focus on specific sins that we may regard as particularly heinous and of which (usually) we are not personally guilty. We can see this in the moral crusades that periodically sweep our political landscape. But in 1 Samuel 15:22 we are told that rebellion (any knowing act of disobedience to God) is parallel to one of the biggest and flashiest of sins: witchcraft. What does this suggest about the distance between God’s standards and our own, often superficial, standards?

Application Questions:

- 1 Though we are all sinners, God stands ready and willing to treat us as if we were upright. How can we best show our gratitude for God’s acceptance of us in Christ?
- 2 We don’t know all the circumstances of Nadab and Abihu’s offering of “strange fire” in Leviticus 10:1–3. Were they being arrogant and sacrilegious intentionally, or did they think what they were doing was right? In the end, knowing the answers wouldn’t change the story. They were placing their own judgment and standards above those of God. How can we guard against doing this same thing, even though the consequences are rarely so swift in today’s world?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: The following activities are meant to help us to focus upon the many reasons we have for being grateful to God for His guidance.

As Christians, we believe in a God who acts in history. And not only does He act in history—the kind covered in the Bible, in commentaries on the Bible, and in history textbooks—but He acts in our lives, as well. Most of us have probably felt at some point that God was trying to tell us something specific, even if not in a literal, audible way.

Ask the class if they have ever been conscious of God communicating with them about their lives or about a given course of action. How did they react? Did they obey? Did they ignore it? What were the results?

Alternative: Focus on worship. Use a chalkboard or a paper chart for this activity. Acknowledge that God speaks to different people in different ways but that there are distinct characteristics of true worship that lead to obedience. Whatever the outward form may be, what should such worship include? Write down answers submitted by the class. What do the answers reveal about our attitudes toward God? About worship? About ourselves?

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:

- 1 Why is it so important to truly keep Christ as the center of worship? 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?
- 2 What are ways in which 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?
- 3 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?
- 4 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?