

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, dragons, fire, earthquakes, plagues, armies, frogs, cities, 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 hast 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 studying 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 regarding 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?

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

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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 7:9, 10*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the scenes of worship in Revelation: the worshipers; where they are; what they do, say, and sing; and why.

Feel: Sense the deep awe and unutterable love and gratitude expressed by prostrating one's self before the throne of God in worship.

Do: Join in eternal adoration of the Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and King.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: A New Song

- A** What are the themes of the worship songs sung in Revelation?
- B** Where are the worshipers, what are they holding, and how do they express their reverence?
- C** How do the songs in heaven relate to what has happened on earth?

II. Feel: On Our Faces

- A** When we bow before God and place our crowns before the throne, what emotions are in our hearts?
- B** What other actions, behavior, and emotions are a part of worship and adoration?
- C** Why do our bodies and actions play an important part in our expression of worship?

III. Do: Joining the Choir

The culmination of all that God has done for this world and the universe can be acknowledged only through worship. How do we participate in this worship hourly, daily, weekly, and throughout eternity? Why is singing together an important aspect of worship that we need to participate in, now and in heaven?

► **Summary:** It is our greatest joy to sing praises to and worship our King, Creator, Judge, and Savior.

Holy, Holy, Holy . . .

Though the book of Revelation still holds many mysteries, the dominant motif comes through time and time again, and that is, one of worship. All throughout 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.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Worship is an important theme throughout the book of Revelation, and the choice of whom we worship is vital today, tomorrow, and for eternity.

Just for Teachers: Ask class members to share an experience from their lives in which they felt “small.” Giving some examples, and perhaps a story of your own, might help to start the sharing. Many of these experiences may include those in the natural world, such as being out on a boat in the open sea, caught in a storm, looking up at the stars on a clear night, or watching a sunset. Other examples could include being part of a large crowd or trying to find one’s way through a large and unfamiliar city. Sharing experiences such as these can provide helpful and enjoyable opportunities to help class members get to know one another and build community, while being a worthwhile introduction to the lesson discussion, as well.

Opening Activity: After your class members share some of their experiences, ask them to identify the common elements in each of these experiences. Discuss what these elements have in common with worship and compare these with the experiences of Job and John, recorded in Job 42:1–6 and Revelation 1:13–18, respectively. As with many other experiences recorded in the Bible stories, people, when confronted by the reality of God, commonly recognize their own smallness and unworthiness in light of God’s goodness and greatness.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: The juxtaposition of scenes of heavenly worship with episodes of earthly conflict and deception paint the final chapters of “the great controversy,” as described in Revelation, in stark reality. God’s perfect kingdom contrasts with the distress of a world gone wrong, with sin and Satan reaching their destructive climax. But the visions that John records are ultimately about hope and the restoration of true worship in our lives, our choices today, and in the restored universe forever.

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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?

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

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

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 throughout 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 it was over for him at the Cross, 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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. Awesome Worship** (Review Revelation 4:8–11, 5:8–14, 7:9–12, 11:15–19, 15:1–4, 19:1–5 with your class.)

Writer Annie Dillard asks the question, “Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute?” She goes on to observe, “On the whole I do not find Christians . . . sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT. . . . It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.”—*Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), p. 52.

Dillard’s observations highlight the danger in losing a sense of the *otherness* of God—His vastness, His supreme power, His majesty. At the same time, she also touches implicitly on what may be the antidote to the problem: nurturing a feeling of awe for a Deity so incomprehensible in power and majesty. But how do we even begin to revere such a Being? How do we bring this sense of awe to the act of worship? The writings of the apostle John in the book of Revelation are a good place to go for answers. Revelation includes some of the most incredible, awe-inspiring worship scenes recorded in the Bible, and when we worship, we are, in a sense, joining in with this eternal kind of worship. This is both a marvelous privilege and a daunting responsibility.

Consider This: Why do you think that we sometimes take worship too lightly? How do we balance awe and joy?

■ *How should Revelation’s depictions of worship in heaven impact the ways in which we worship as a church?*

II. The Worship Choice (Review Revelation 13 and 14 with your class.)

Revelation describes a false system of worship that seeks to take the place of the true worship of God. At the same time that it speaks against God and His people, this false system also tries to imitate the true worship that is core to the life of heaven. This contrast between false and true

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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 studying all quarter? Why do we call these verses “present truth”?**

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*).

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

systems of worship, as portrayed in Revelation 13 and 14, is a call to “worship Him who made heaven and earth” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), as well as a warning to be careful, prayerful, and discerning as to whom and how we worship. Sometimes worship is not what it seems: worshipers can be deceived, and Satan is at work in his attempts to subvert the best gifts God gives to us.

Consider This: If we accept that worshipping God is an important part of the Christian life, what should we look for to discern that worship is genuine?

■ *How important is truth in worship? Is it necessary to have “all the answers” to truly worship? Why, or why not? What makes the difference?*

III. Overwhelmed (*Review Revelation 22:8, 9 with your class.*)

A number of times during the visions recorded in Revelation, John was completely overwhelmed by what he saw and experienced. In *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* (Brazos Press, 2007), Scott Bader-Saye quotes Irish theologian David Ford in arguing that our lives are shaped by such “overwhelmings,” both positive and negative. “Our overwhelming fears,” Bader-Saye notes, “need, themselves, to be overwhelmed by bigger and better things, by a sense of adventure and fullness of life that comes from locating our fears and vulnerabilities within a larger story that is ultimately hopeful.”—Page 60. That larger story is the story—and stories—of Jesus, the reality of the kingdom of God, and the hope that He offers us and our world. And that is always the foundation for worship.

Consider This: How can we maintain our focus on God and His purposes when issues in our lives seem overwhelming?

■ *How do the heavenly worship scenes in Revelation relate to the often-frightening scenes, in that same book, related to God’s people on earth? What reassurance do these worship scenes offer to us?*

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The warnings about worship in Revelation should lead us to sober consideration and questions about what genuine worship should be. On the other hand, the descriptions of worship in heaven give us a glimpse of what worship can, should, and will be.

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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?

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. This recalls 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?

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 worshiping more creation, worshiping idols of one form or another, worshiping 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

After a number of weeks studying this topic through the Bible, this should give much ground for discussion.

Application Questions:

- 1** Where does the gospel fit into the descriptions of true and false worship in Revelation?
- 2** Does it sometimes seem from descriptions, such as those in Revelation, that God just likes people telling Him how good He is all the time? How would you answer this question from a friend who has little knowledge of God and is troubled by the idea that God seems somewhat egotistical?
- 3** To what extent do Revelation's descriptions of worship in heaven give us guidelines as to how we should worship? What do we learn about how we should worship in church, for example?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: After 13 weeks spent talking about worship, class members may have new insights, understandings, and appreciation of worship, as well as of its importance in the story of the Bible and the life of the Christian and the church. Allow class members to reflect on what they have discovered, to share some of these insights, and to take some time to worship together. Let's not spend so much time talking about worship without having worshiped, and let's find ways to incorporate worship more intentionally into our lives every day.

Individual Activities: Friday's study begins with a definition of "worship" from Richard M. Davidson. Review this definition. After studying through this series, how would you define "worship"? Share your working definitions with members of the class. How has your definition of "worship" changed during your past weeks of study?

Group or Team Activities: Ask class members to bring along something to share that helps them to worship or helps to explain what worship means to them. It might be a song, poem, piece of writing, favorite Bible text, photo, or something else. Ask them to explain their items and then share them with the rest of the class. Affirm class members in their worship, encourage the class to learn from one another, and use these different items as opportunities to worship as a group.

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.”—Page 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 throng 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?