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Some of the most well-known verses among Seventh-day Adventists are these: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:6, 7). And though we view these verses in the context of last-day events, they also help to form the foundation for our topic this quarter, which is worship. Not only are we called to worship, but we can, in these verses, find key themes to help us understand what true worship should be about.

First, John sees an angel who has the “everlasting gospel,” the gospel of the everlasting covenant, the good news that Jesus Christ would come, take upon Himself humanity, and in that humanity die as a Substitute for the sins of the world. Jesus’ death in our behalf needs to be foundational to all our worship then. Worship should center on our response to the substitutionary work of Christ, which includes not only the Cross but His ongoing ministry for us in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1).

Next, John tells us to “fear God.” Fearing God and loving God are two sides of the same coin: to fear God is to stand in awe, in reverence for who He is as Creator and Redeemer, in contrast to whom we are as the created and the redeemed. When
we approach God in worship as a kind of buddy or pal, we degrade Him and place ourselves in a role in which we do not belong. Worship should be permeated by a sense of reverence and awe for our God, an attitude that will give us the humility and surrender so needed for true worship.

We are also told to “give glory to Him.” What is crucial here is that worship must be about God and not about ourselves. We have to make sure that worship is not people-centered, culture-centered, or personal-needs-centered but God-centered. We worship God, not ourselves; hence, worship must be about Him, about giving glory to Him, and not about music, culture, or worship styles.

We are told to fear God and give glory to Him. Why? Because “the hour of his judgment [has] come.” Christ is not only the Redeemer. He is also the Judge, a Judge who knows all our deepest and darkest secrets, a Judge who knows the innermost recesses of our hearts. As we worship, we need to do so with the sense of an accountability to God for what we do and a realization that we can hide nothing from Him, a fact that should drive us to the Cross, our only hope in this judgment.

Finally, we are told to worship the Creator. Creation is so foundational to all worship, because all that we believe, without exception, is based on the fact that God is Creator. We worship Him because He is Creator and because He is Redeemer and because He is Judge. Creation and Redemption and judgment are closely tied, and all true worship needs to be firmly rooted in these objective theological truths. How fascinating, too, that in Revelation 14:7 we find language that reflects the Sabbath commandment (Exod. 20:11), a day inseparably linked to the true worship of God.

This quarter, as we study worship, these motifs will appear again and again, for they are central to what true worship should be about. And with worship as such a central component of “present truth,” we would do well to learn what it means to truly worship the only One in all creation who, by virtue of who He is, is worthy of that worship.

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How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
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; however 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 in the Bible. In the story of Cain and Abel, two kinds of worshipers appear, one worshiping 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 perfectly formed; 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. This is an act tied directly to His work of creating the heavens and the earth and 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? Vss. 11–13. What did his response reveal about what had happened to him?

After the Fall many 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, the hearts of Adam and Eve were now filled with fear, guilt, and shame. Instead of desiring His holy presence, they hid from Him. For them, their relationship with God, which surely impacted how they worshiped Him, had been shattered. The close and intimate communion with God, which they once had 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 this is of 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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Genesis 28:16, 17

The Student Will:

Know: Compare and contrast the two classes of worshipers as characterized by Cain and Abel, described in Genesis.

Feel: Sense the differences of attitude between worshipers who treasure what God provides and those whose worship centers on what they bring to the altar of worship.

Do: Worship God by honoring God’s sacrifice of His Son Jesus, offered for our salvation.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Our Offering Versus God’s Offering

A What characterized true worshipers such as Abel, Abraham, and Jacob?

B Why was sacrifice such an important aspect of their worship? What other activities were a part of their worship?

C Why was Cain’s worship not acceptable to God? What other worship activities noted in Genesis were not acceptable? What is the danger of participating in false worship?

II. Feel: Awe and Reverence

How did the worshipers in Genesis express their feelings about God and their relationship to Him in their acts of worship? How do we express these same feelings and relationships today?

III. Do: Sacrifice Is Worship

A How do we make Christ’s sacrifice an integral part of our worship?

B What danger do we face when we leave sacrifice out of our private and public devotional services?

C What other activities do we include as part of our worship, and why?

Summary: True worshipers in Genesis centered their devotional activities on what God had provided to deliver us from sin.
Worship Outside of Eden

After their expulsion, Adam and Eve began life outside the Eden paradise. While the first gospel promise was given to them 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?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Worship is not just a separate, compartmentalized zone of human activity; it is key to everything about our identity, relationships with others, and ultimate destiny.

Just for Teachers: The purpose of this week’s lesson is to challenge your students to make God central to their worship.

Self-centered worship puts self on the throne and hangs our resurrected Savior back on the cross. It uses religion to show God how good we are rather than praising Him for His goodness to us.

Cain engaged in this form of self-centered worship (Gen. 4:3–5). He brought God an offering of agricultural produce, which he had grown and tended, in order to impress God with his worthiness. God rejected Cain’s offering because, among other reasons (such as the fact that God demanded blood sacrifices), He knew the selfish and self-promoting motives behind the act. This kind of “worship” persists to this day. Maybe we’ve even been guilty of imitating Cain at times.

God calls us to true worship, to call on His name as though our lives depended on it. Because they do.

Discuss With the Class: God sacrificed Himself to give us something we don’t have and could never have on our own. What should our response be, and why?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that the Bible sees worship as a model for how we should interact with God in every area of our lives. Worship is a conscious effort to seek God’s presence. As we worship, we invite God into every area of our lives and enable Him to repair the separation resulting from sin.

Bible Commentary

I. Calling Upon the Name of the Lord (Review Genesis 4:25, 26 with your class.)

One of the beginnings described in this chapter is that, at that time,
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 it is that the first thing Noah does is worship. And central to that act of 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 knows that he is 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?
“people began to invoke the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26, NRSV). While this statement may seem to be straightforward, there are several levels of meaning here.

The context leads us to believe that this form of worship primarily—or exclusively—occurred among the descendants of Adam through his third son, Seth. In fact, with all the “firsts” mentioned in this chapter—cities, nomadism, instrumental music, to name a few examples—this is the only achievement specifically credited to Seth’s lineage rather than to Cain’s. Does this mean that Cain’s line had no form of worship? Conversely, does it mean that Seth’s line completely scorned all forms of technological or cultural innovation?

While the text is silent concerning these questions, what we know about human nature suggests otherwise. Complex social and cultural constructs, such as those devised by Cain’s lineage, typically had some form of religion or worship at their base. All the cultures and civilizations of the ancient Near East based their legitimacy on gods or cultural heroes who exemplified that culture’s or civilization’s strengths and values. The culture or civilization justified its own existence or necessity by pointing to these gods or heroes who supported it. In essence, these human-made systems justified and glorified the people who put them in place, precisely what Cain hoped for from the one true God when he made his offering to Him in Genesis 4:3. So when the author discusses the lineage of Cain, he discusses what was important to them: their victories, their achievements—or, in modern terms, the sense of their own “awesomeness.”

In the same way, when thinking about the descendants of Seth, we may assume that they were probably as intelligent and inventive as the Cainites. They, too, were faced with a world that no longer simply provided for them without effort on their part. It is not reasonable to assume that they had no cultural or technological achievements. But, unlike the Cainites, the descendants of Seth did not value these achievements as their main reason for being. What was important to them was that they were people who called on the name of the Lord. This emphasis is what the author notes when discussing them and their legacy. Theirs was a spiritual legacy based on their relation to God, rather than on the works of their hands.

It is also important to note the specificity of this statement. The Sethites were not simply people who thought there might be a God somewhere or felt a need to be “spiritual.” They called on the name of Yahweh Himself. Rather than seeing God as a prop for their civilization’s values or as ratification for their actions or achievements, they sought and worshiped God and His will and placed Him first and foremost in life.
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 in their decision 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. It is truly amazing; one hardly can imagine it. What should this teach us about the weakness of our own faith?
**Consider This:** Even if we call ourselves Christians, we must search our hearts to determine whether we seek God and His will first or whether we regard God as an accessory or a means to an end. What does it mean, then, to seek God and His will first? How do we manifest this attitude?

**II. Fearing God** *(Review Genesis 28:10–22 with your class.)*

This passage opens with Jacob fleeing in fear, if not blind terror, from Esau’s anger. Jacob comes to what most translations refer to as “a certain place.” In the original language, this phrase suggests a place that was already known to most of the surrounding people as sacred; a location where God or other numinous beings, it was believed, revealed themselves. Some scholars even take the word translated as “place” to mean a sanctuary, which it turned out, in fact, to be.

Jacob finds what he thinks is a random rock to keep his head off the bare ground as he sleeps. He drifts off, and he sees angels ascending and descending a heavenly ladder, a promise that the channel between the sin-wrecked soul and the Savior was open. The dream reaffirms the covenant that God had made with Jacob’s father and grandfather, which he had probably been told about repeatedly as he was growing up.

The result is that Jacob’s entire sense of values changes in that short period of time. Whereas before he feared Esau and possibly the dangers of the wilderness, he now knows that he stands in the presence of a Being who loves him completely and who, at the same time, is so powerful that He could erase him with a thought. Perhaps this certain place was not so ordinary after all. Jacob’s response is (what else could it be?) worship.

In the same way, we may think that our lives are ordinary and inconsequential, or we may place supreme importance on things that are only relatively and temporally significant. But in reality we are living in the presence of God. If you are a Christian, all ground is holy ground. Sometimes we forget. Worship is how we remember.

**Consider This:** How does your worship of God help you to be mindful of His presence, power, and majesty?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following questions to help your students to be able to exercise discernment between true and false worship and to choose wisely.
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 that 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?
Thought Questions:

1. What do you think worship might have been like in Eden, where the presence of God was so much more accessible?

2. Early in Genesis we see the practice of animal sacrifice. Some people trace the origins of the practice back to God’s act of making animal-skin garments for our first parents. Later on in Exodus and in the following books, sacrifices are mandated in detail. How do you think the practice of animal sacrifice originated, and, more important, what spiritual purpose did it serve?

Application Questions:

1. In the accounts of the lives and acts of many biblical figures, worship seems to be what they do first. With so many things competing for our attention, how can we be sure to put worship first?

2. What parts do study and knowledge of the Scriptures play in our worship?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The lesson makes clear that there are two types of worshipers spoken of in the Bible. The first are those who expect to impress God by their own merit. The second are those who truly seek to know who God is and seek to attribute all credit and glory to Him. The following activities are meant to emphasize and encourage the students to be the latter.

Pick a series of biblical figures and briefly tell their stories. Pick an even ratio of “good” and “bad” ones. Ask the students to decide which group each individual character belongs to. If you want to add something extra, don’t reveal the names of the characters and allow your class to place the characters, based on their descriptions, into groups without preconceptions.

Alternative: Perhaps the best way to understand worship is to do it. Have each member write on a slip of paper what he or she sees as one of God’s praiseworthy attributes. Take a few moments to read the slips and to praise God collectively for being who He is. This can be done at the beginning or end of class.

“[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:

1. 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?

2. How can our worship services become more effective tools 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?

3. Review the story of Abraham’s act of 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?

4. 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?
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 worshiping what you do not know. In a sense, that is what almost all the world has done, or perhaps is doing now—worshiping what they do not know. When you see someone bowing down and worshiping a block of stone, thinking it will answer their prayers, you are seeing people worshiping what they do not know. That is, they are worshiping 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, worshiping what they do not know. They are worshiping that which cannot save them.

In the immediate Christian context, the question for us could be: do we know what we are worshiping? 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 had most likely never seen 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 with 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 it is 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 it is 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 when He freed 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 Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Exodus 20:2, 3

The Student Will:
   Know: Contrast the feelings and behaviors of the worshipers gathered around the image of the calf with the feelings and behaviors of those worshipers at the foot of Mount Sinai.
   Feel: Offer humble worship to God, sensing His ruling majesty, creative power, and holy righteousness.
   Do: Honor the God of the Exodus, respecting and responding to His expectations for worship.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Respect or Revelry?
   A Why was it so important for God to demonstrate who He was with fire, thundering words, and earthquakes at Mount Sinai?
   B What distinguishes the reverent celebration of God’s delivering power from the hedonistic revelry Israel displayed around the image of the calf? How did Israel fall into this type of false worship?
   C How might similar temptations for us arise, and how do we guard against disrespectful and false worship?

II. Feel: God Is Deserving of Worship
   A How did God present Himself to Moses and Israel, as He taught them how to worship Him?
   B What emotions and behaviors arise from a recognition of God’s glory, power, and righteousness?

III. Do: Majestic Ruler, Almighty Deliverer
   A What images and concepts of God are important to keep in mind as we approach Him in worship?
   B How do we express our devotion in an intimate, yet respectful, manner?

Summary: While God personally delivered Israel from Egypt and showed Himself in many concrete ways to His people, He required deep acknowledgment and respect of His holy, transcendent nature.
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 as “worshiped” 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 can 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?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** True worship is characterized by the awareness and acknowledgment of the infinite greatness of God and our aspiration to know Him better. The true worshiper will refuse to accept substitutes for God, also known as idols.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the contrast between God and the things in our lives that we might be tempted to put above God.

*Idol.* All of us are familiar with the word. If we are students of the Bible or listen to those who are, we know the word refers to an image of a false god. Some cultures and religions thought that the power resided in the image itself; others that it was a focal point through which the god in question manifested himself or herself to the worshiper. But the important point is that the idol is, or was, a human artifact that had no true significance outside of the imagination, superstitions, or misconceptions of its maker.

Yet, the word *idol* is used in other ways. It is used in the titles of popular television shows in a number of countries. Someone whom one admires very much is frequently referred to as “my idol.” Of course, it is just a figure of speech, or meant ironically—one would hope. But the reality is that the world does encourage us to place our adoration and trust in things that are as temporal and passing as we are. And while we are not exactly encouraged to worship them, some of the emotion around these things and people certainly looks and feels a lot like worship. It can be argued that this dampens the desire and inclination to worship God authentically.

In the book of Exodus, we see the mighty acts of God, the only being worthy of worship. We also see the human tendency to substitute other things for God and the confusion and sadness that result.

**Consider This:** What is necessary in order to maintain the proper attitude toward God and a correct realization of who and what He is? How can the things of this world siphon away the reverence and worship we should reserve for God alone? How can we keep our priorities in order?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the contrast between a true attitude of worship, as seen in Moses’ experience at Mount Horeb (*Exod. 3:1–15*), and that which characterizes the worship of false gods (*Exod. 32:1–6*).
No Other Gods

Imagine the scene: Mount Sinai is enveloped in a thick cloud, quaking with thunder, lightning flashing, trumpets blasting. The people tremble. Smoke fills the air because the God of Israel has descended in fire upon the holy mount (Exod. 19:16–19). There, amid the cloud and the smoke, He reveals Himself in awful grandeur. Then the voice of their Deliverer proclaims 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?

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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 to 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?

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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 compete for my affections, my time, my priorities, or my goals? What are they, and how can I remove them?
Bible Commentary

I. “I AM has sent . . . you” (Review Exodus 3:1–15 with your class.)

God first showed Himself to Moses in a very ordinary object: a bush. A bush that happened to be on fire. In such a dry area bushes must have caught fire quite often. Fire was nature’s way of clearing dead vegetation to make room for live vegetation. But Moses immediately noted something that was not so natural and usual: the bush was not being consumed. It was a living insult to the laws of thermodynamics, which even the ancients must have understood intuitively. Having gotten Moses’ attention, the Lord would now work in a special way with His servant.

God created bushes, as well as fire, and He created the laws governing the relationship between the two. But God is greater than these laws. God can, if He so chooses, override them completely, which He obviously did.

Moses was familiar with the way things usually were: bushes burned. But in this instance he saw two natural phenomena behaving in unnatural ways, ways that indicated that God was present. God had popped up in the middle of His creation, and strange things were happening. The natural response was worship. Moses had to be told to remove his shoes, but he did not have to be told to prostrate himself.

When we worship today, it is usually a scheduled event. It is rarely a spontaneous explosion of the presence of God, such as Moses experienced. We go to church at the same time every week. Or we set aside a time for personal or family worship. It is easy, even with the best intentions, to allow worship to become just another routine. But we should always remember that true worship is where we meet God in the midst of ordinary reality and recognize that, perhaps, it is not so ordinary after all. Worship reminds us that God is at the center of ordinary reality and that this reality—and we ourselves—are utterly dependent on Him.

Consider This: How does God show Himself in your daily life? What are the ways in which you honor and thank Him for His presence?

II. The Golden Calf (Review Exodus 32:1–6 with your class.)

When one looks at the story of the golden calf, it is easy to assume that the Israelites were simply appropriating the gods of the adjacent pagan cultures and abandoning Yahweh. Such would seem to be suggested in
“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?

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

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

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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 marks true worship, does it?

The mixed multitude (Egyptians who had chosen to accompany Israel in the Exodus or 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 that we, in our own worship, do not fall into the same trap?
the passages (vss. 1, 4) in which the people are said to have asked Aaron to make gods for them and then praised these objects as the gods who brought them out of Egypt. But we also have verse 5, in which Aaron refers to the impending festival as “a festival to the Lord” (NIV), literally Yahweh.

Taken together, all this suggests that at least some of the people thought that while still honoring Yahweh they could have gods similar to those of their neighbors. They would have this riotous pagan orgy, but by dedicating it to the Lord, they would somehow make it acceptable to God.

So, what we really observe in these passages is not so much open apostasy as it is syncretism. Syncretism is the combining of often mutually contradictory religions or belief systems, many times on the basis of political expediency, personal taste, or whim. As with many morally or theologically dubious notions, rationalizations for syncretism are easy to come by.

For example, consider what might have been going on in Aaron’s mind. Moses seemed to have disappeared without a trace, and without his charismatic leadership, the people’s loyalty to Yahweh was flagging. Their faith was of the “what-has-He-done-for-me-lately?” variety. Aaron, at one level, was probably terrified of mutiny. At the same time, he was too loyal or timid to abandon Yahweh outright. Why not, he might have thought, give the people enough of what they wanted to keep them in the fold in the event Moses returned? It was settled, then. He would give them only one false god, though they asked for many; and he would make that false god Yahweh’s friend, his sidekick.

If the flawed reasoning behind this rationale was not obvious from the beginning, it certainly must have become so when the festivities commenced. Aaron and the others soon discovered that there was no such thing as a little false worship. Mixing a little pagan worship with “a festival to the Lord” resulted in a pagan festival, just as it would have if they had simply set out to abandon Yahweh and embrace paganism. Just as poison mixed with food masks the poison but doesn’t change its nature, false worship mixed with true worship equals only false worship.

Consider This: What are the results of attempting to marry worship of the true God with elements that are incompatible, or even contradictory? Why do we attempt it?
“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 pleaded with God on their behalf (Exod. 32:30–33). Because of their terrible sin, God commanded His “stiff-necked” 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?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to emphasize the importance of knowing God and of seeking to know God as a key element in worship. Stress how true knowledge of what and who God really is precludes idolatry, or the worship of gods of our own making or imagination.

Thought Questions:

1. What does it mean when we say we fear God? Is it fear in the sense that we are afraid of God? Explain. Is there some sense in which we should be afraid of God? Why, or why not?

2. Why do you think the people of Israel had such short memories of what God had done for them? What might this have said about how they approached God in worship and in their daily lives?

Application Questions:

1. In Exodus 3:1–15 we witness Moses’ initial reluctance to do what God asks of him. But when he worships, he recognizes that God has sufficient power to use him in an effective way. How can worship of God give us confidence?

2. Our God is a big God. There are many valid ways to worship Him. How can we discern which ways are compatible with what the Bible tells us is correct and spiritually honest worship and which ways compromise or contradict the spirit of true worship? How can we be sure that our views on the subject are not derived merely from our opinions, or even prejudices?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This lesson emphasizes the God-centeredness of true worship. The following activities are intended to encourage your class members to center their lives on worship and to derive their priorities and sense of self from the true knowledge of God gained thereby.

Ask your class members: In what ways have they experienced what they regarded to be a true miracle or anything that conveyed to them the message that they could approach life in a spirit of godly confidence?

“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 reverenced; 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 in which these two important truths about God 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 to 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?
As we saw in the introduction, creation and redemption are central to the first angel’s message and the theme of worship. The first angel calls us to the “everlasting gospel,” the good news of salvation in Jesus—a salvation that includes not only forgiveness of sin but power over it. The gospel, then, promises us a new life in Christ, the promise of sanctification, which itself is part of the process of salvation and redemption (John 17:17, Acts 20:32, 1 Thess. 5:23).

And, as we saw, the first angel’s message includes a special reminder that the One whom we are to worship is our creator—the One who made us and the world we live in.

Thus, linked to worship are the themes of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Not surprisingly, these three themes are revealed in the Sabbath, a crucial element in the events depicted in Revelation 14 when the question faces all of us: do we worship the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier or the beast and his image? The texts do not leave us any third option.

This week we will take a look at the Sabbath commandment and how these themes are revealed in this day. As we study, ask yourself, how can we make these themes central to our worship experience?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.
Creation and Redemption: The Foundation of Worship

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8). The words *remember* and *memorial* in Hebrew come from the same Hebrew root, *zkr*. When God said, “Remember,” He was giving the people a memorial of two great events, one being the foundation of the other.

**According to the fourth commandment, what are these two events, and how are they related to each other?** Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15.

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Christ’s role as Creator is inextricably linked to His role as Redeemer, and every week the Sabbath highlights both of these roles. Not monthly, not yearly, but weekly, and without exception—that is how important it is. The One who designed and made us is the same One who delivered Israel from Egypt and delivers us from the bondage of sin.

**Read** Colossians 1:13–22. How does Paul clearly link Christ in His role as Creator and Redeemer?

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Creation and Redemption are at the foundation of all biblical truth, and they are so important that we have been ordered to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of these truths. From Eden, where the seventh day was first set aside, up until now, there have been people who have worshiped the Lord through keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

**Think for a moment about how important these two truths must be for the Lord to have given us a weekly reminder of them; so important that He commands us to devote one-seventh of our lives in a special kind of rest in order that we can better focus our attention on these truths. How can your Sabbath-worship experience help to enhance your appreciation of Christ as Creator and Redeemer?**
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Psalm 95:6, 7

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Explain the relationship between worship and the Sabbath, Creation, Redemption, and sanctification.
- **Feel:** Rejoice in the celebration of Creation, as well as the deliverance and restoration for which the Sabbath provides opportunities.
- **Do:** Remember the Sabbath and all for which it stands throughout the week as a cornerstone of our personal faith and the doctrines by which we live.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Creator, Redeemer, Restorer**
   - A How does the Sabbath look both backward and forward to celebrate pivotal acts of God on our behalf? What are these grand acts?
   - B How is keeping the Sabbath holy a sign and a witness to unbelievers regarding our relationship to God?

II. **Feel: Much to Celebrate**
   - A What is it about God’s created world that brings us joy? How does the Sabbath give us the opportunity to celebrate Creation and the Creator?
   - B How does celebrating the Sabbath bring us closer to our Redeemer and deepen our relationship with Him?
   - C How do we celebrate sanctification on the Sabbath?

III. **Do: Critical Cornerstones and Safeguards**
   - A While Sabbath comes once a week, how does its significance shape how we live during the rest of our week?
   - B What aspects of Creation, Redemption, and sanctification are foundational to our everyday activities and philosophies of life?

**Summary:** Sabbath worship immortalizes God’s act of Creation, our deliverance from sin, and our restoration to holiness. It is a witness to unbelievers and the universe at large regarding our identity and our relationship to God.
Remember Your Creator

The Bible begins with the famous line, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The verb “created,” bara, refers to actions of God only. Humans can build things, make things, create things, and form things, but God alone can bara. Only God can create space, time, matter, and energy—all part of the material world in which we exist. It is all here, only because God bara-ed it.

Of course, how He did it remains a mystery. Science barely understands what matter itself is, much less how it was created and why it exists in the form that it does. What is crucial, however, is that we never forget for a moment where it all came from. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9, NKJV).

Also, when an important project is finished, people like to celebrate. For example, when we build a church, we dedicate it to God. Similarly, when God finished with the earth, He commemorated the event by setting aside a special day, the Sabbath.

*Compare* Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:12, 18; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2 to Isaiah 44:15–20; 46:5–7. What contrast is being made here?

Ever since the great controversy between Christ and Satan reached the earth, the enemy has tried to lead people to doubt or deny the existence of the true God, the Creator. Through ignorance of His Word or denial of the evidence of His creative power, human intelligence seeks to find ways to explain our origins in ways other than from the Lord. All sorts of theories have been proposed. The most popular today, of course, is evolution, which posits random mutation and natural selection as the means by which all life and intelligence exist. Someone recently presented a theory that we are all just computer projections and that we do not really exist but are merely the computer creations of some super-race of alien beings. In many ways, one could argue that the wooden gods Isaiah wrote about, which were worshiped by their own makers, are as good as many of the other theories of origins often presented as an alternative to the God of the Bible.

If we truly accept the Sabbath for what the Bible says it is—a memorial of God’s six days of Creation—how can we be protected from false ideas about our origins? Also, who would want to worship a God who used the vicious and violent process of evolution to create us, as some teach?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Historically, the Sabbath has always distinguished true worshipers of God. God’s mighty act of Creation, as well as His promised redemption, is contained in the Sabbath, and we show our belief in His power and His promises by observing the Sabbath commandment.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the importance of Sabbath rest and worship to our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

We all know that we need to exercise. Reams of New Year’s resolutions testify to this idea. We understand that if we want good health, we have to work for it. The last thing we need is more time resting, isn’t it?

It’s true that many or most people in developed nations are too sedentary and very exercise deprived. But are you aware that they are also sleep deprived? Most of us are aware of the negative results that come from a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity is one; related ills such as type 2 diabetes and coronary or vascular disease also come to mind. But did you know that sleep deprivation contributes to many of the same things? Lack of sleep results in increased levels of a hormone called cortisol. In excess, cortisol tells our bodies to store more belly fat. It also adds stress to the vital organs, making us susceptible to certain degenerative diseases. All of this can be prevented by more restful sleep as a part of a healthy lifestyle that also includes proper exercise and nutrition.

So, nature itself decrees that we must spend a certain amount of time resting or risk death and illness at an early age. But rest doesn’t come naturally to us.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we recognize a spiritual dimension to rest as exemplified in the Sabbath commandment. The Sabbath rest is not just “relaxation,” however beneficial. By keeping it, we acknowledge our utter dependence on God in worship. And we worship Him in the way and time of His choosing, not necessarily our own.

**Consider This:** Why is the Sabbath commandment—a clear mandate from God—so widely misunderstood, ignored, and even mocked by Christians? How can we personally help others to understand and appreciate it?
Freedom From Slavery

As we have already seen, the Sabbath points not only to Creation, an important theme of worship, but also to Redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (NIV). These words echo the crucial theme of the first angel’s message, that of Redemption and salvation.

And this Redemption is symbolized by what the Lord did for the children of Israel through the Exodus. No god in Egypt had the power to stop this nation of slaves from escaping their bondage. Only the God of Israel, who revealed Himself in powerful miracles and His presence in majestic and blinding glory, had the ability to deliver them with “a mighty hand” and a “stretched out arm” (Deut. 5:15). God wanted them to remember “that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him” (Deut 4:35, NKJV). So, He gave them the Sabbath day to be a constant reminder of His great deliverance and as a reminder to us of the bondage from which Christ has freed us.

Read Romans 6:16–23. What promises are offered us there, and how does this relate to what the Lord did for Israel in Egypt?

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The New Testament clearly teaches that the slavery of sin demands a powerful Savior, as did the Egyptian bondage of ancient Israel. That is what the children of Israel had in their Lord; and that is what we as Christians today also have, because the God who delivered them from their bondage is the same One who delivers us from ours.

If we ever needed a reason to worship the Lord, would it not be for the deliverance from slavery that He has won for us? The children of Israel sang a great song once they had been delivered. (See Exodus 15.) Thus, the Sabbath worship experience should be a celebration of God’s grace in freeing us not only from the legal penalty of sin (which fell upon Jesus on our behalf) but from the power of sin to enslave us.

What does it mean to no longer be slaves to sin? Does it mean we are not sinful, or that we do not at times still sin? Most important, how can you learn to claim and make real the promises of freedom that the gospel offers us?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the Sabbath as a sign of our Creation and our Redemption. Also emphasize its importance as a period of time explicitly and specifically dedicated to God.

Bible Commentary

I. You Don’t Have to Be Jewish . . . (Review Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 with your class.)

For many cultures and religions, time is cyclical: what has happened before will happen again. Even if we do not subscribe to a cyclical view of nature and time, as, for example, Mayans did and Hindus still do, it would be fairly easy to believe that “everything has remained the same since the world was first created” (2 Pet. 3:4, NLT).

But as Christians and Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the world had a beginning. Occurring at the end of the cyclical seven-day week, the Sabbath is a reminder of our origin as creatures of God, created in His image. With the Sabbath, God marked the beginning of the present age of creation. And it has been observed ever since. Consider other commemorations or festivals. None of them go back to the beginning of the world, with the exception of the Sabbath. This alone suggests that the Sabbath is not a Jewish thing, it’s a God thing.

Consider This: We are told to remember the Sabbath. This doesn’t just mean that when it occurs we should remember only to stop working, shopping, or watching mindless entertainment (although it does mean that). It also directs us to look at why we do these things, or stop doing them, as the case may be. The Sabbath directs us to the beginning and, therefore, to God.

Many people consider the Sabbath to be an archaic relic of the past, whether of the Old Testament laws or the dreary Sabbaths of their youth, when it was defined by what they couldn’t do. Is Sabbath a burden to you,
Remember Your Sanctifier

Read Exodus 31:13. What do you understand this to mean? How is it relevant for us today? What does it mean to have God sanctify us? How can we experience this process in our own lives?

Creation, Redemption, sanctification—they all are related. Creation, of course, is the foundation of everything (for without it there would be no one to redeem and sanctify). Yet, in our fallen condition, creation is no longer enough; we needed Redemption, the promise of forgiveness for our sins. Otherwise, we would face eternal destruction, and our creation would be forever over.

Of course, inseparably linked to Redemption is sanctification, the process by which we grow in holiness and in grace in our lives. The word translated as “sanctify” in Exodus 31:13 comes from the same root word used in Exodus 20:8, when the Lord tells the people to keep the Sabbath “holy.” The same root appears in Exodus 20:11, which says that God “hallowed” or “made holy” the Sabbath day (see also Genesis 2:3, where God “sanctified” the seventh day). In all these cases the root, qds, means “to be holy,” “to set aside as holy,” to be “dedicated as holy.”

God called Israel and set them apart as His holy people, to be a light to the world. Christ called His disciples to the mission of carrying the gospel to the world. Central to that task is the holiness and character of the ones spreading the message. The gospel is not just about no longer being condemned for our sins. As we saw yesterday, it is about being free from the bondage of our sins. It is about being new people in Christ and having our lives be living witnesses to what God can do for us here and now.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we relate this text to the themes of Creation and Redemption and the Sabbath? How can our Sabbath worship help us to focus on these themes?

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

or is it a reminder of God’s awesome creative and redemptive power, and why? If the former, what needs to change for you?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Sabbath reminds us of God’s mighty acts on our behalf, His promises, and His sufficiency for all our needs. Use the following questions to emphasize the centrality of the Sabbath to any full experience of the peace and redemption offered to us by God.

Thought Questions:

1. What does the existence of the Sabbath, the same day every week since the beginning of time, tell us about the trustworthiness and stability of God in a world in which so much is changeable and transitory?

2. Describe how all of God’s acts—Creation, sanctification, and Redemption—are mirrored in the celebration of the Sabbath.

Application Questions:

1. The observance of the Sabbath is often posed as a quasi-legal, rules-based question. What criteria would you use—or reject, for that matter—to determine what does or does not honor God as a Sabbath activity? How do you keep the Sabbath holy?
Resting in Redemption

Creation, Redemption, and sanctification: we have all these in Christ, and they all are symbolized in a special way through the blessings of the Sabbath.

In Matthew 11:28–30 read Jesus’ invitation to rest. How does the Sabbath fit in with what Jesus is telling us here?

The “rest” Jesus offered to people included emotional, psychological, and spiritual rest for those who were burdened with heavy loads, including the load of sin, guilt, and fear. In addition to the basic human need for physical rest, there is an equally important need for the mind and the spirit to have a change of pace—to rest from the burdens and the stress of daily living. God designed the Sabbath for precisely that. Studies have shown that productivity in the workplace actually increases with a weekly break. Bringing closure to the usual routine of life enhances mental acuity and physical endurance. Further, the Sabbath provides the needed sense of anticipation that helps prevent boredom and fatigue.

While anyone can say that they are resting in Christ, the Sabbath gives us a concrete and physical manifestation of that rest. The Sabbath stands as a symbol of the rest that we truly have in Him, in the salvation Christ has wrought for us.

The Sabbath also meets us at the level of our emotional life. It gives us a sense of identity: we are created in the image of God, and we belong to Him because He made us.

And just as God gave us the marriage institution in Eden to meet the human need for horizontal intimacy, so He gave us the Sabbath for vertical intimacy between the Creator and His creatures.

The Sabbath promises fulfillment—what we may become through Christ’s work of restoration. It gives us hope for the future—the ultimate eternal Sabbath rest. But most important of all, the Sabbath meets us at the highest of all human needs, the need to worship something or Someone. God in His great wisdom has given us the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, a day to spend in honor and praise of Him.

What burdens are you carrying from which you need to have rest, and how can you learn to give them to Him? How can your Sabbath worship experience help you to learn truly to rest in Him?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

How does the Sabbath help to remind you of God’s presence and centrality in all things?

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STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The gift of the Sabbath is a gift of a sanctified place in time during which we have nothing to do other than to honor God for that which He has done (Creation), that which He is doing (sanctification), and that which He will do (Redemption). Emphasize that, in a way, when we enter the Sabbath rest we are entering a different place, as well as a different time.

Bring a suitcase (or any piece of luggage) and a few objects to class (clothes, toiletries, and so on—anything one could imagine packing for a trip). Start packing these items into the suitcase. Ask your class what they think of bringing when they travel anywhere for a given length of time. Perhaps you will pass around slips of paper so they can make short lists.

Then make the point that we should regard the Sabbath as a distinctly different place, as well as a segment of the week. How might we be better prepared to honor the Sabbath if we thought of it as a place to which we were going? Ask the class how they would prepare if they were to think of the Sabbath in this way.

Alternative: Lead a discussion on what the Sabbath has meant to the individual lives of your members. Have they ever had to sacrifice anything for it, such as jobs or social engagements? Is the Sabbath a relief, and, if so, why? Is it a source of more stress? Explain. How can we improve our experience of the Sabbath and gain the blessing God wants us to derive from it?

“God designed that [Sabbath] observance should designate [Israel] as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.

“When the Lord delivered His people Israel from Egypt and committed to them His law, He taught them that by the observance of the Sabbath they were to be distinguished from idolaters. It was this that made the distinction between those who acknowledge the sovereignty of God and those who refuse to accept Him as their Creator and King.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 349.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Dwell more on the idea of how true Sabbath keeping can protect us from many of the delusions regarding Creation. Think, for instance, about the final events regarding those who worship the beast as opposed to those who worship the Creator (see Revelation 14). How would a false understanding of our origins—such as the idea that Jesus used evolution to create us—set people up to be deceived in the final days?

2. Go back over the question of Sabbath and worship. How does your church worship on Sabbath? Is the service geared toward exalting God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? If not, what is the emphasis? How can we learn to keep the Lord as the focus of our worship experience?

3. Creation is central to all our beliefs. Why does nothing we believe as Seventh-day Adventists make any sense at all apart from God as the Creator? Creation is foundational to all that we believe, and the Sabbath is imbedded in the original Creation account. How do these facts help to reveal just how pivotal and basic the Sabbath is? How does this help us to better understand how, in the last days, when false powers seek to compel the worship that God alone deserves, the Sabbath will be so central to that final drama?
Rejoicing Before the Lord: The Sanctuary and Worship

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 25:1–9; Exodus 35; 29:38, 39; 25:10–22; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.

Memory Text: “And ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you” (Deuteronomy 12:12).

Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, wrote about a friend who, nearing death, explained his own loss of faith. The man said that from his childhood he had prayed, his own act of private devotion and worship before going to sleep. One day, after a hunting trip with his brother, they were getting ready for bed in the same room, and he knelt down to pray. His brother looked at him and said, “You still doing that?” From that moment on, the man never prayed again, never worshiped again, never exercised any faith. The words, “You still doing that?” revealed just how empty and meaningless this ritual had been to him all these years, and thus he stopped.

This story illustrates the danger of mere ritual. Worship needs to come from the heart, from the soul, from a true relationship with God. That is why this week we will look at the ancient Israelite sanctuary service, the center of Israelite worship, and derive what lessons we can from it about how we can have a deeper worship experience.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.
“That I May Dwell Among Them”

“‘You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established’” (Exod. 15:17, NKJV).

This is the first mention in Scripture of a sanctuary. It was sung as part of the song of deliverance by the children of Israel after their escape from Egypt. The verse talks not just about the sanctuary but implies that it will be God’s dwelling on earth. The Hebrew word translated as “dwelling” comes from a root that means, literally, “to sit.” Was the Lord really going to dwell, “to sit,” among His people here on earth?

Read Exodus 25:1–9. What are the two main points that we learn from the verses, and why are they amazing? (As you think about the answer, think about who God is, His power, His might and majesty.)

The God who delivered Israel was now going to dwell among them. The same God who was able to perform so many incredible “signs and wonders” (Deut. 6:22), the God who created the heavens and the earth, would now live among His people. Talk about the presence of God being near!

On top of that, He was going to live in a building made by fallen human beings. He, who spoke the world into existence, could have spoken the word and created a magnificent structure. Instead, He had His people intimately and intricately involved in the creation of the place constructed not only for His dwelling but the place that would be the center of all Israelite worship.

The Israelites didn’t make the sanctuary according to human standards but “‘according to . . . the pattern, . . . just so you shall make it’” (Exod. 25:9, NKJV). Every aspect of the earthly tabernacle was to represent a holy God properly and be worthy of His presence.

Everything about it was to inspire a sense of awe and reverence. After all, this was the dwelling place of the Creator of the universe.

Imagine standing outside a building and knowing that inside that very structure dwelled Yahweh, the Creator God, the Lord of the heavens and earth. What kind of attitude would you have, and why? What should your answer tell you about the attitude you should have during worship?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Deuteronomy 12:12

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Illustrate how the sanctuary was not only the center of worship but at the center of relationship and communication with God.

**Feel:** Nurture attitudes of earnest searching, selfless service, and celebration of God’s blessings in our acts of worship.

**Do:** Present ourselves daily as a living and holy sacrifice in worship.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: God Dwelling With Us**
   - How did the sanctuary provide a place where one could experience a saving relationship with God?
   - How did the sanctuary illustrate doctrines regarding God’s holy and glorious character and expectations regarding how He was to be worshiped?
   - How did it provide for opportunities to celebrate God’s blessings?
   - How did the sanctuary provide opportunity for communication and relationship?

II. **Feel: The Earnest Seeker After God**
   - Though the ritual sacrifices were offered daily, what attitudes on the part of the worshipers kept these rituals from sinking into meaningless, heartless tradition?
   - What role did the calendar of feasts and Sabbaths play in fostering attitudes of rejoicing and celebration in worship?

III. **Do: Living Temple, Living Sacrifice**
   - How do the sanctuary services of Israel’s time inform our daily devotions and spiritual service?
   - How do they inform our weekly, communal worship services?

**Summary:** The sanctuary worship services centered on God’s provisions to save us from sin and make us holy on a daily basis. They also provided the means of intimate communication and celebration of God’s goodness.
Willing Hearts

As we saw yesterday, not only did the Lord choose to dwell among His people, He did so in a building that they were to make themselves, as opposed to something He created supernaturally. That is, He got them directly involved, an act that ideally would have drawn them closer to Him. Along with that, He didn’t miraculously create the material that would be used for the structure.

Read Exodus 35. What is happening here, and what important lessons can we take from this for ourselves in regard to the whole question of worship?

Notice the emphasis on the word willing. God said, “whoever is of a willing heart” (Exod. 35:5, NKJV), and everyone “whose heart was stirred” (Exod. 35:21, NKJV) responded. This means that there was no fire and thunder and loud voice from Sinai commanding them to give these offerings. Instead, here we see the working of the Holy Spirit, who never forces Himself on anyone. Their willingness to give revealed a sense of thanksgiving and gratefulness. After all, look at what the Lord had done for them.

Also, notice that the people were not only willing to give to the work of building a sanctuary, but they did so with a spirit of joy and energy. They willingly gave material gifts, their time, their talents, and the work of their creative abilities: “All the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom . . .” (vs. 26, NKJV); “everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work” (Exod. 36:2, NKJV).

By giving as they were, what were the Israelites also doing, even before the sanctuary was made?

We often tend to think of worship as a group of people coming together to sing, pray, and listen to a sermon. And while that is true, worship is not limited to that. What the children of Israel were doing here was worshiping. Every act of self-denial in giving up their own material goods or their own time or their own talents for the cause of their Lord was an act of worship.

Think about your own acts of giving—tithes, offerings, time, talent. How have you experienced what it means to worship through these acts? By giving of yourself, how are you enriched in return?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Worship is not a spectator sport (or a sport at all, for that matter). Worship demands our engagement, both in the active(praising of God and in the giving of ourselves and what we have.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize the value that God places upon our relationship with Him as seen in our experience of worship and giving.

A long time ago in Rome there was a merchant. Every year of his adult life he had paid the prescribed tax of one denarius to the emperor. His business prospered, but what he had was never enough. So, he quietly resented paying that one denarius. Nevertheless, he continued to pay, knowing there was no alternative. But one day, he said to his friend, “You know, it is really very stupid for me to have to pay the emperor one denarius every year.”

His friend looked at him in surprise. “Why?” he asked.

“Think about it,” replied the merchant. “Who mints the denarii?”

“Why, the emperor, I guess,” said his friend, clearly uncomfortable with this possibly seditious line of thought.

“Exactly!” exclaimed the merchant. “So why does he need my denarius, when he could mint his own and keep them?”

His friend grinned, as if he had been struck with a new idea. “You know, for such a successful man you really aren’t very bright. The whole point is that he doesn’t want *his* denarius—he wants *yours!*”

While the comparison of God with an earthly authority like an emperor is not entirely adequate, people have wondered since the beginning of time why God wants our worship, obedience, and service when He is completely self-sufficient. Why, for example, did God need the kings and people of Israel to build Him a sanctuary? Why did He allow His worship to be conducted in a series of crude tents (the literal meaning of tabernacle, by the way) until He found someone who He felt was worthy of undertaking the project of building a permanent structure? For that matter, why does He need or want us at all?

On a human level it is hard to imagine the implications, much less the answer, to these questions. But we serve a God who grants us the privilege of helping Him to finish His work on earth, even to the extent of living among us and ultimately becoming one of us. As we contemplate this thought, let us never come to take Him for granted or think of our worship as meaningless ritual.

**Consider This:** Are worship, giving, and service to God the privileges they
The Continual Burnt Offering

“‘Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb... in the morning, and the other lamb... at twilight’” (Exod. 29:38, 39, NKJV).

The daily offering of lambs, the “continual burnt offering” (vs. 42), was to teach the people their constant need of God and their dependence on Him for forgiveness and acceptance. The fire on the altar was to be kept burning day and night (Lev. 6:8–13). This fire could serve as a perpetual reminder of their need of a Savior.

God never intended the daily offering of a lamb to be simply a ritual or routine act. It was to be a time of “intense interest to the worshipers,” a time of preparation for worship, in silent prayer and “with earnest heart searching and confession of sin.” Their faith was to grasp the promises of a Savior to come, the true Lamb of God who would spill His blood for the sins of the whole world (see Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 353).

How do the following texts link the death of Christ to animal sacrifices in the Old Testament system? Heb. 10:1–4; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.

In Hebrews 10:5–10, Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8, showing that Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the sacrificial offerings. He suggests that God received no pleasure from these sacrifices but that they were intended to be a time of sorrow for sin, of repentance, and of turning away from sin. Likewise, the giving of His Son as the ultimate sacrifice would be a time of terrible agony and heartrending sorrow for both the Father and the Son. Paul also emphasized that true worship must always flow from a forgiven, cleansed, and sanctified heart that delights in obeying the One who has made it all possible. “Therefore, I urge you brethren, . . . to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1, NASB).

Worship means, first and foremost, giving ourselves wholly and completely to God as a living sacrifice. When we give ourselves first, our gifts, our praise, and our hearts will follow. This attitude is a sure protection against meaningless and empty rituals.

Ask yourself these questions: Have I given everything over to Christ, who died for my sins? Or is there some corner of my heart or life of which I refuse to let go? If so, what is it, and how can I be willing to give it up?
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

are meant to be for you, or do you feel they are mere routine, or even burdensome? If the latter, what is needed for you to change your attitude?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the role of giving and personal sacrifice in our worship of God, as exemplified in the activities regarding the holy sanctuary as described in the biblical texts we will study.

Bible Commentary

I. Tabernacle or Tavern . . . ? (Review Exodus 35 with your class.)

The English word *tabernacle* has a fine, religious, churchy sound to it. The word, a translation of the Hebrew *mishkan*, or “dwelling place,” is derived in English from the Latin *tabernaculum*, which literally refers to a tent. If you look more closely, it becomes clear that it shares a common origin with the word *taberna*, which can mean a hut, booth, or tavern. All very humble structures and, in the case of taverns, even slightly disreputable. But in reality, the only major distinction is the use to which the words have been put. If the history of language had been slightly different, we might be referring to the *tavern* of God, and looking down on people who frequent tabernacles.

The tabernacle constructed by the Hebrews in the desert was, in fact, a tent. It was the nicest tent that could be built under the circumstances, but it was a tent nonetheless. The materials were selected with quite specific criteria, but the tent itself was probably similar in basic substance and design to the tents the Hebrews themselves lived in. It was the presence of God that made it holy, and the fact that it had been built in obedience to His instructions; otherwise it would have been just another place.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul tells us that the body of the person who has chosen to dedicate himself or herself to God is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, literally a tabernacle or dwelling place. We mention this quite often in reference to health practices, and that is an important part of it. But the main difference between a Christian and a nonbeliever is that the Christian has allowed God to dwell within, and he or she has chosen to use all his or her strength, energy, and talents to serve Him, however humble they may be. So the question is, are you a tabernacle, or just a tent?
Communion With God

One of the key aspects of being a Christian, of having a saving relationship with Christ, is that of knowing the Lord. Jesus Himself 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). As in any kind of relationship, communication is the key.

Read Exodus 25:10–22. What are the people being told to make, and what promises are they given?

Above the sacred ark that contained God’s holy law, and enshrined on the mercy seat, dwelt the very presence of God in the Shekinah glory. There, “mercy and truth [were] met together; righteousness and peace . . . kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). There, from the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the smoke ascended, representing the prayers of God’s people mingled with the merits and intercession of Christ.

Amid all this is the promise: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (Exod. 25:22).

God promised the people not just His presence; He promised to communicate with His people, to talk to them, to guide them in the ways in which they should go.


Today, of course, we do not have an earthly sanctuary, but we do have the promises of God’s guidance and presence in our lives if we surrender to Him. What believer has not seen the leading of the Lord at some point in his or her life?

Here, too, is where worship comes in. We must worship the Lord in an attitude of submission, of surrender, of willingness to be led. A heart yielded to the Lord in prayer, submission, reverence, and surrender, a heart sensing its own need of salvation, of grace, of repentance, is a heart that—full of worshipful praise to God—will be guided in the way that the Lord would desire. In the end, true worship should help you be more open to God’s leading because it should help you learn an attitude of faith and submission. There is nothing empty in this kind of worship.
Learning Cycle  CONTINUED

Consider This: What does worship mean to you? How are you building your life in accordance with His perfect will for you?

II. Living Sacrifice  (Review Hebrews 10:1–4 and Romans 12:1 with your class.)

In the Old Testament, worship meant sacrifice, and sacrifice meant something had to die. All had sinned, and sin meant death, if not to oneself, then to an innocent animal. Few probably understood how this transaction worked in all its metaphysical details, but it made a certain amount of sense on an intuitive level. There was a debt to be paid, and it had to be paid with a life.

The people who came to be called Christians came to understand this in a different, and possibly counterintuitive, way. Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and Resurrection had occurred in the full light of history, and which many of them had personally witnessed, had fulfilled the true meaning of these sacrifices. People who claimed His sacrifice for their sins seemed to change, to actually become happier and better—in a word, selfless. The sacrifice did not need to be repeated as did the temple ceremonies. The old ways seemed to be a shadow of the new and living way. Jesus had died, but He had come back to life! What kind of sacrifice ended with the victim alive and healthy?

As it turned out, the old ways had literally been a shadow of what was to come. God didn’t want the lives of animals. The only sacrifice He wanted from us was ourselves, filled with new life: a living sacrifice.

Consider This: True worship still demands sacrifice. Not because God is greedy or wants us to live miserable lives, but because it is the appropriate response to the immeasurable riches we have in Christ. What does it truly mean to give your life to the God who gave His life for you?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to emphasize the importance of worship as action, as well as a matter of emotion or attitude. Attitudes that are not acted upon are also known as fantasies.

Thought Questions:

1. Considering that God derived no true benefit from the sacrifices of the temple ritual, why did they seem so important to Him in the books of the Old Testament? How were they more of a promise of what He was going to do in Christ?
Rejoicing Before the Lord

Substantial parts of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers center on the sanctuary service—its construction, its services, the sacrifices and offerings presented there, and the ministration of the priests. It was a very sacred and holy place. After all, it was not only the place where God Himself dwelt, it was the place where Israel came to be forgiven and cleansed of sin. It was the place where Israel learned and experienced the gospel.

At the same time, we must not come away with the idea that Israelite worship was cold, sterile, and formal. The Lord had set very strict guidelines on what was to be done, but these guidelines were not ends in themselves. Rather, they were means to an end, and the end was that His people would be a holy, joyful, and faithful covenant nation that would teach the world about the true God (Exod. 19:6, Deut. 4:5–7, Zech. 8:23).

What do these texts tell us about Israelite worship at the sanctuary? Lev. 23:39–44; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.

One of the great struggles facing the church today has to do with worship and worship styles. On one end, church services can be cold, formal, stale, and definitely without joy. The other danger is that emotions become the dominant factor: all that people want to do is have a good time, “rejoicing” in the Lord at the expense of any kind of strict adherence to biblical truths.

An important point to remember, a lesson that we can learn from the sanctuary model, is that all true worship, which should lead to rejoicing, must be so in the context of biblical truth. God gave the Israelites very clear, strict, and formal instructions regarding the construction of the sanctuary and its ministry and services, all of which were meant to teach them the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment. And yet, at the same time, they were to rejoice before the Lord in their worship. This theme appears again and again. It should be clear, then, that one can be very strong in biblical teaching and at the same time have a joyous worship experience. After all, if the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment are not worth rejoicing over, what is?

What is your own experience in rejoicing before the Lord? What does this mean to you? How can you have a more joyful worship experience? How can you make sure that your worship experience is not similar to the friend Tolstoy discussed in this week’s introduction?
God communicated with the Israelites in quite dramatic ways in the Old Testament, especially in the time of Moses. Much of this communication took place in a context of worship. How does God communicate with us today, and how is it facilitated by our worship?

**Application Questions:**

1. While we don’t want worship to be merely a routine, it must become a routine of sorts to be effective in our lives. We need to worship whether or not we happen to feel like it at the moment. Many times, the feelings will follow if we offer our hearts to God. How can we discern that our worship is losing its meaning, and what can we do to bring it back?

2. In Tuesday’s lesson Ellen G. White is quoted as saying that the sacrifices that eventually became rote rituals were originally intended to be occasions of intense prayer and soul searching. In some ways, our experience is no different. We start out with high ideals and ambitions, but they seem to decay over time if we aren’t mindful. What can we do to keep our worship a vital communication between ourselves and God?

> **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize worship as an acknowledgment of the reality of God. The following activities will emphasize the act of being mindful of His reality and greatness.

As the lesson notes, the ancient Hebrews were able to look at a distinct building and structure and know that God was represented there; that is, they were looking at a structure and believed that the very presence of God, in a special way, was there. Ask your class to imagine such a concrete presence of God. How would their actions or behaviors change? How would the way they think about things change? After discussing this, emphasize that as Christians, we do live in the presence of God.

If you want to add an extra dimension to this idea, make your students remove their shoes as they walk into the room, as Moses did at the burning bush.

**Alternative:** Ask the class members to consider areas of their lives in which they might still need to be made over. Suggest that they take note of those areas and make them a topic of focused prayer in the coming days, weeks, or months, and that they look for changes.

From the Holy Shekinah, “God made known His will. Divine messages were sometimes communicated to the high priest by a voice from the cloud. Sometimes a light fell upon the angel at the right, to signify approval or acceptance, or a shadow or cloud rested upon the one at the left to reveal disapproval or rejection.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 349.

“In them [His people] the Lord designed to dwell in His fulness in this world; not only in a general way by dwelling in a tent; but by so completely taking possession of their lives, as to show them, and through them the world, how the Messiah would be the dwelling-place of God.”—F. C. Gilbert, Practical Lessons From the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today (Concord, Mass.: Good Tidings Press, 1902), p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can you help others to see that the giving of tithes and offerings is truly an act of worship? What are we compromising when we do not tithe and do not give offerings?

2. Look at your own church services. Do they lean more toward the cold, formal, sterile, and joyless? Or do they lean more toward the emotional, toward excitement, and feeling? Or is there a good balance between the extremes? Discuss.

3. In an attempt to reach out to the nonchurched, some congregations radically have altered their worship services. While this could be a very good thing, of what dangers should they be aware, such as that of compromise and of the watering down of crucial biblical truths?

4. In some worship services, rituals have been performed a certain way for many years, and that is the reason given for not wanting to make any changes. How would you respond to the answer, “This is how we have always done it” when change is suggested and rejected?

5. The earthly sanctuary was a very sacred and holy place, the place where God Himself dwelt. At the same time, the children of Israel were to rejoice before the Lord there. What lessons can we draw from these important truths about worship?
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.
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?

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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?
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
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?

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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 worshiping a distant, far off, abstract being; we are worshiping the God who created and redeemed us and who interacts in human affairs. We are worshiping 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?
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?
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?
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?

“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?
Worship and Song and Praise

SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Ps. 32:1–5; 1 Chron. 51:1–6, 17; 1 Chron. 16:8–36; Rev. 4:9–11; 5:9–13; Phil. 4:8.

**Memory Text:** “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (Psalm 96:1).

**K**ing David’s life is recorded in the Bible for many reasons: not only does an important part of Israelite history center on his life and reign, but we can learn many spiritual lessons from both his good deeds and his bad.

This week we will start out using some examples from David and his life in order to delve more into the question of worship: what it means, how we should do it, and what it should do for us. For in David we can see many examples of worship and song and praise. These things were a crucial part of his life and of his experience with the Lord.

Thus it must be with us, as well, especially if we constantly remember that the first angel’s message is a call to worship. What does it mean “to worship”? How do we do it? Why do we do it? What role does music play in worship? What distinguishes true worship from false worship?

These are all themes that we will address in various ways this quarter as we heed the call: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Ps. 95:6, 7).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.*
Between Saul and David

Read the following glimpses into David’s life before he became king: 1 Samuel 16:6–13, 17:45–47, 18:14, 24:10, 26:9, 30:6–8. What does this tell us about David?

God chose Saul as the first king of Israel because he matched the description requested by the people. But when God chose David to be the next king of Israel, He reminded Samuel that the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

David was far from perfect. In fact, some would argue that David’s later moral lapses were much more serious than Saul’s sins. Yet, the Lord rejected Saul but forgave even David’s worst mistakes, allowing him to continue being king. What made the difference?

See Psalms 32:1–5, 51:1–6. What crucial concept is found in these texts that is so central to faith?

God is in the heart business. He not only reads the heart—the center of thought, inner attitudes, and motives—but He can touch and change hearts that are open to Him. David’s heart yielded to the conviction of sin. He repented, and he patiently accepted the consequences of his sins. In contrast, whatever outward confessions Saul made, it was clear that his heart was not surrendered to the Lord. “Yet the Lord, having placed on Saul the responsibility of the kingdom, did not leave him to himself. He caused the Holy Spirit to rest upon Saul to reveal to him his own weakness and his need of divine grace; and had Saul relied upon God, God would have been with him. So long as his will was controlled by the will of God, so long as he yielded to the discipline of His Spirit, God could crown his efforts with success. But when Saul chose to act independently of God, the Lord could no longer be his guide, and was forced to set him aside.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 636.

Ask yourself, how does what goes on inside your heart differ from what people see of you on the outside? What does your answer say to you about yourself?
The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** Psalm 96:1

► **The Student Will:**
  **Know:** Review the themes of worship present in David’s psalms, as well as in the songs of Revelation.
  **Feel:** Cultivate a sense of penitence in order to be filled with the joy of Christ’s deliverance.
  **Do:** Offer praise and glory to God and recount what He has done for us.

► **Learning Outline:**
  
  I. **Know:** A New Song

  A For what acts of deliverance did David have to praise God?
  B Though David had sinned greatly, what was the difference between his sin and Saul’s in last week’s lesson?
  C Why is it important to sing about what God has done for us? What do we have to sing about that draws us near to heaven and the singing that happens there?

  II. **Feel:** Contrition and Praise

  A How did David’s brokenness and sorrow over his sin lead to praise songs?
  B Why is it important for us to make the same progression from expressions of penitence to rejoicing over Christ’s deliverance?

  III. **Do:** Worthy Is the Lamb

  A What songs do you use to recount what God has done for you, and why?
  B How and when do you express praise through song? How can you make song a more important and personal part of your worship experience, both in your private devotions and in church worship?

► **Summary:** Song is an important medium whereby we express our contrition and need, recount God’s goodness, and offer Him glory and praise.
A Broken Heart, a Broken Spirit

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:17, NKJV). Think about these words of David, but in the context of worship. (After all, in ancient Israel, worship centered around the sacrifice.) Realize, too, that the word translated as “contrite” comes from a Hebrew word that means “crushed.” What is the Lord saying to us here? How are we to understand this idea along with the idea that there should be joy in our worship? Why are these two contrasting concepts not necessarily contradictory?

As Christians, we take it as a given (or at least we should) that all of humanity is fallen, sinful, degraded. This degradation and sinfulness includes each one of us, individually. Think of the contrast between that which you know you could be and what you are; the contrast between the kind of thoughts that you think and the kind you know that you should think; the contrast between what you do and what you should do, between what you do not do and what you know that you should. As Christians, with the biblical standard of Jesus before us, the personal realization of our true nature can be especially devastating. It is from here that our broken spirit and crushed and broken hearts come. If those professing to be Christians do not see this, they are truly blind; most likely they have not had a conversion experience or have lost it.

Yet, the joy comes from knowing that, despite our fallen state, God loves us so much that Christ came and died, offering Himself for us that His perfect life, His perfect holiness and His perfect character become credited to us by faith. Again, the theme of the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6) appears. Our worship should center not just on our own sinfulness but on God’s amazing solution to it: the Cross. Of course, we need that broken and crushed heart, but we always need to position that sad reality against the background of what God has done for us in Christ. In fact, the realization of how bad we are leads to joy, because we know that, despite our state, we can have eternal life anyway, and that because of Jesus, God will not count our transgressions against us. This is a truth that must always be at the center of all worship experiences, whether corporate or private.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** David used music as an important means to explore God’s spiritual truths and as a way of sharing with God such emotions as loneliness, betrayal, and sorrow for sin. He also used it to praise, celebrate, and recognize God’s assurances in return.

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your class members to relate to the power of music in evoking a worshipful atmosphere. Explore its role in teaching spiritual lessons by asking the students to discuss personal experiences with music in worship.

**Opening Activity:** Peter Rutenberg, director of the Los Angeles Chamber Singers, writes about the benefits of music: “Research over the last few decades has increasingly shown that music, and in particular the singing and playing of music, helps the brain develop much more fully and extensively, especially in our early years. Music makes us brighter, more intelligent, more logical, more rational, and more capable. It improves study habits and test scores. It builds a better sense of self and community. It aids in our general sense of well-being and improves our quality of life. . . . A recent study even suggests that the act of singing improves the immune system.”

Music is a whole-body experience, appealing not only to our emotions but to our bodies and minds. It can provide a powerful and touching corporate experience that tempers the atmosphere, prepares our hearts for spiritual truths, and brings us together in a common encounter with God. It is no wonder that music plays such an important part in worship.

**Consider This:** Discuss with your class their experiences with music in worship. At what times have they experienced a profound connection and understanding of a spiritual truth through a piece of music? How has music drawn their heart toward God? When has music created an atmosphere of joy, of reverence and awe, of praise, of solidarity in faith? To illustrate these points, play a CD or sing several songs that demonstrate the variety of spiritual truths and/or atmospheres for worship that music can create, such as “Faith of Our Fathers,” “There Is a Place of Quiet Rest,” “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow,” or “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.”
David: A Song of Praise and Worship

David’s understanding of God and the salvation He offered shaped not only his own life but his spiritual leadership and influence over his people. His songs and prayers reflect a deep sense of awe for the God he loved and knew as a personal friend and Savior.

According to 1 Chronicles 16:7, David presented to Asaph, his chief musician, a new song of thanksgiving and praise on the day that the ark was moved to Jerusalem. This praise psalm consists of two important aspects of worship: the revelation of God as One worthy of worship and the appropriate response of the worshiper. In this song, David first calls worshipers to active participation in worship.

Read the entire song in 1 Chronicles 16:8–36. Notice how often the following action words and expressions are used, especially in the first part of the song: give thanks, sing, call on His name, seek the Lord, make known, talk of, declare, give glory to, proclaim, remember, and bring an offering. David then recited some of the reasons why God is worthy of our praise and worship.

What were some of the events of the past that the people of Israel were to make known to others? 1 Chron. 16:8, 12, 16–22. What special acts of God were they to remember? Vss. 12, 15.

The psalmist’s rehearsal of the covenant takes up nearly a third of this thanksgiving hymn. In what way does the covenant relate to worship?

The covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was based on His ability, as their Ruler, to make them a great nation, to bless them, and to bring them into the Promised Land. Their part was to love, obey, and worship Him as their Father and God. However different our context today may be, the same principle still holds.

Meditate on the ways in which David calls us to worship God. In our own time, place, and context, how can these same ideas be reflected in our corporate worship of the Lord?
Try playing a familiar song on CD or invite a soloist to sing a stanza of a familiar hymn, and then sing the same song together as a class. How is the experience of listening to music different from singing together as a choir or congregation? What parts do both types of musical experiences play in worship? See Peter Rutenberg, “The Importance of Music in Everyone’s Life.” Retrieved January 16, 2010, from http://www.shumeiarts.org/article_rutenberg.html.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help your class to become familiar with the way that David used poetry and music to respond to the things he learned about God.

Bible Commentary

I. Songster Shepherd Boy (Review 1 Samuel 16:6–17:58 with your class.)

Jesse’s youngest son, David, was responsible for his father’s sheep, and apparently his father hadn’t considered him important enough or old enough to be invited to a feast at which the rest of the family were special guests of Samuel. Samuel was there to anoint David, but it was done in secret, and it apparently didn’t alter David’s place in the family; afterward, he went back to the sheep. But like Moses in the desert 40 years with his flocks, this time for David was one of preparation for leading God’s people.

As David cared for his flocks, met dangers, and was delivered from peril, he was learning lessons of courage, fortitude, and trust in the Great Shepherd that prepared him to take an elevated place among earth’s most noble men. And no wonder, for his companions in those remote regions were the noblest that heaven or earth could provide. As David meditated among the mountains and hills, the valleys and streams, the sunsets and sunrises, and he saw the handprints of the Father of lights and the Author of every good gift, “he was daily coming into a more intimate communion with God. His mind was constantly penetrating into new depths for fresh themes to inspire his song and to wake the music of his harp,” and
David’s Song

“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Second Samuel 22 records a song that David wrote in praise of the Lord. (Skim through the song and note the key elements and how they are linked to worship.) The key point here, and in so many other places in the Bible, is that this was a song. It was music. All through Scripture we find music as an integral part of worship. According to the text above, the angels sang in response to the Creation of the world.

Read Revelation 4:9–11, 5:9–13, 7:10–12, 14:1–3. What does this tell us about some of the things that go on in the sinless environment of heaven? What are some of the themes expressed here, and what can we learn from them about worship?

Central to the theme of the songs and praise and adoration is Jesus as Creator and as Redeemer. If they sing about that in heaven, how much more so should we be doing the same here on earth?

There is no question that song and music and praise are part of our worship experience. As creatures made in God’s image, we share a love and an appreciation for music, as do other intelligent beings. It is hard to imagine a culture that does not use music in some way or another, for some purpose or another. Love and appreciation of music are woven into the very fabric of our human existence; God surely made us that way.

Music has the power to touch us and move us that other forms of communication do not seem to have. At its purest and finest, music seems to lift us into the very presence of the Lord. Who has not experienced, at some point, the power of music to bring us closer to our Maker?

What has been your own spiritual experience with the power of music? What kind of music do you listen to, and how does it impact your relationship with the Lord?
his songs echoed among the hills “as if responsive to the rejoicing of the angles’ songs in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 642.

These times taught David wisdom and gave him a piety that made him much beloved of God and the angels. As he meditated on his Creator, “obscure themes were illuminated, difficulties were made plain, perplexities were harmonized, and each ray of new light called forth fresh bursts of rapture, and sweeter anthems of devotion, to the glory of God and the Redeemer.”—Page 642. Much of the music David wrote during this time has come down to us through the book of Psalms, to awaken love and faith and devotion in our own hearts and to bring us closer to the loving heart of our Creator.

**Consider This:** On what occasions was David summoned to play and sing in King Saul’s court? How must the atmosphere of the court and David’s ministries to a king burdened with rebellion, bitterness, and despair have affected the young shepherd as he went back to his flocks, knowing, as he did, that he was destined to sit on Saul’s throne? Where did he learn to find strength in times of hardship? Examine Psalms 37, 40, and 41 for themes that indicate important lessons that David must have learned during these years.

**II. A Faulty Yet Contrite King** *(Review Psalms 32 and 51 with your class.)*

David had a strong, trusting relationship with God that guided him through all the years of fleeing from what quickly developed into jealous hatred on the part of King Saul. Yet, David was not above temptation.

Psalms 32 and 51 describe his response to his terrible fall into sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, after David became king. “Thus in a sacred song to be sung in the public assemblies of his people, in the presence of the court—priests and judges, princes and men of war—and which would preserve to the latest generation the knowledge of his fall, the king of Israel recounted his sin, his repentance, and his hope of pardon through the mercy of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 725.

Though David had initially tried to cover up his sin to the point of murder, once he was convicted, he sought to prevent others from falling into the same pit. He loathed the defilement caused by sin and longed for purity that only God could provide, unlike Saul, who loathed the results of his rebellion but not the sin. David recognized how far-reaching the loss
“Sing a New Song to the Lord!”

Unfortunately, though we have access to some of the themes and lyrics of divinely inspired songs, we do not have any of the music itself. Thus, using our God-given gifts (at least, those of us who have those gifts), we write our own music if not always our own lyrics. But as we all know, we do not do this in a vacuum. We worship in relationship to the culture in which we live, a culture that to some degree influences us and our music. This can be a good thing, or this can be a bad thing. The hard thing is to know the difference.

Read the following texts. How can they give us principles that should guide us in the kind of music we have in our worship? 1 Cor. 10:31, Phil. 4:8, Col. 1:18.

Over the years, the question of music and types of music in worship has arisen in our church. In some cases, hymnal music has been given all but sacred status; in others, it is hard to tell the difference between what is being played in church and what is being played as secular music.

What is important for worship music is that it point us to the noblest and the best, which is the Lord. It should appeal, not to the baser elements of our being but to the higher ones. Music is not morally neutral: it can move us to some of the most exalted spiritual experiences, or it can be used by the enemy to debase and degrade us, to bring out lust and passion and despair and anger. All one has to do is look at what some of the music industry today produces to see powerful examples of how Satan has perverted another of God’s wonderful gifts to humanity.

Music in our worship services should have a balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements. The lyrics, in harmony with the music itself, should uplift us, elevate our thoughts, and make us long more for the Lord who has done so much for us. Music that can bring us to the foot of the cross, that can help us to realize what we have been given in Christ, is the kind we need for our worship.

Again, various cultures have different tastes in music, and music and musical instruments vary in our worldwide family. What is uplifting and encouraging to those in one culture might sound strange to those in another. Either way, how important it is that we seek the Lord’s guidance in our choice of appropriate music for our worship services.
of respect would be and how devastating now his influence for evil was among his people, especially among his own sons. This broke his heart, and as his songs portray, he realized that his only hope was to cling to God and humbly accept the judgments that followed from God’s loving but thoroughly just hand.

**Consider This:** What were the consequences of David’s sin? How did he respond to the judgments decreed by God? For example, discuss the circumstances surrounding the deaths of David’s four sons. How did David respond to three of their four deaths? (The fourth son was killed after the king’s death.) See 2 Samuel 12–20 and 1 Kings 1, 2.

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Challenge your class members to try putting a favorite verse of the Psalms to music. This is an excellent way to memorize scripture.

**Application:**

1. As you read Psalms 32 and 51 together, ask your class to list the lessons they contain about contrition, forgiveness, and God’s mercy and justice in dealing with our tendencies to fall into sin.

2. When has the Lord delivered you from disaster? Ask your class members to examine the songs of deliverance as described in Psalms 18, 34, 57, and 59 and to share the verses with which they most identify, and why, as they recount how God rescued them from trouble.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Suggest the following ideas to help your class to put the class discussion into practice during the following weeks or months.

1. Challenge your class members to write their own psalm and put it to music. Ask for a showing of hands of those willing to perform their creations in class the following week.

2. Go to a favorite spot in nature and look for inspiration to write a piece of poetry to your Creator.
Further Study: “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

Music “is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . .

“As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . .

“As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do your culture and society impact the music in your church, or do you deny such an impact exists?

2. Read the Ellen White quote in Friday’s study about music. How much of this do you experience with the kind of music that is part of your church’s worship service? What are ways that we can evaluate the role of music in our church services? How can your church members work together to ensure that the music is, indeed, uplifting and encouraging, fulfilling the role that it should?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Psalms 90:1, 2; 100:1–5; 73; 49; 141:2; 20:3; 54:6; 78:1–8.

Memory Text: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1, 2, NIV).

The Hebrew word translated as “Psalms” comes from a root word that means “to sing with instrumental accompaniment.” Thus, the Psalms were songs, songs that were intricately part of the worship of Israel. Though we have the lyrics (the Psalms themselves), we do not have the music. How fascinating it would be to hear these songs, in their original tongue, sung with the music that first accompanied them.

The Psalms themselves are rich and deep, covering a wide range of topics and emotions, dealing with everything from the corporate history of Israel to the songwriter’s most intimate and personal pain. In that sense, they speak to us because, though as a church we are part of the long history that goes back to Israel, we also are individuals with our own private pain. It is doubtful that any of us could not relate at some time or another to some of the agony expressed in the Psalms. At the same time, though, it is crucial that we reach out and grasp the hope expressed in them.

This week we will look at the Psalms and some of the themes found in them and how these themes relate to the question of worship and what it means for us today.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.
Worship the Lord, Our Maker

The Psalms of praise describe who God is and why He is worthy of worship. They declare His greatness, and call worshipers to come with joyful adoration to honor Him.

What do the following examples have in common? Pss. 90:1, 2; 95:1–6; 100:1–5.

Psalm 19 is another song in praise of God as Creator. What is its essential message, and why is this message especially important for us today, at a time when many argue that we exist only by chance alone as the result of natural and unguided forces?

Notice how the psalmist suddenly shifts from discussing God’s glory revealed in the heavens to His revealed word. This abrupt transition is intentional. Read John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:1–3. What great truth is the psalmist emphasizing?

The same God who spoke the world into existence also gave the moral, physical, and social laws needed to govern the human family. The Old Testament Scriptures clearly identify God as both the Creator of the world and the Giver of the Written Law. The New Testament writers see Jesus Christ as the Creator and the Giver of the Law, as well as the Word made flesh, who lived among His creatures in order to reveal the Father to them and to die as their Substitute. Thus, He alone is worthy of adoration and worship.

Hence, we see in the Psalms one of the foundational principles of worship as seen in the first angel’s message (Rev. 14:7). We worship the Lord because He is our Creator, and directly tied to His role as Creator is His role as our Redeemer (Rev. 14:6). Creator and Redeemer—if these are not reasons to praise and worship Him, what are?

How can you seek to get to know the Lord better through His created works?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Psalm 84:1, 2

**The Student Will:**
- **Know:** Outline the wide variety of emotions and personal, as well as corporate, content of the themes addressed in the Psalms.
- **Feel:** Identify with the passionate laments and soaring praises of these deeply personal worship songs.
- **Do:** Use the sanctuary imagery of the Psalms to connect with the Creator, Judge, Sacrificial Lamb, and King.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Hymnal as Heartbeat**
   - A. How do the Psalms address the many problems that trouble us personally and as a church?
   - B. What is the value of addressing such varied themes as history, social injustice, personal betrayal, law, Creation, and eternal judgment in corporate worship songs?

II. **Feel: From Laments to Celebration**
   - A. How do the Psalms help to voice the deepest cries of the heart? Why is it important to connect personally with God in these intimate and stirring ways?
   - B. How do the Psalms provide an important means for group worship? How do the themes in the Psalms help to bring a community together and strengthen it in its search for a communal relationship to God?

III. **Do: Sanctuary Imagery**
   It’s not hard to imagine how many of the Psalms were used in the context of sanctuary worship because of the sanctuary imagery that appears throughout them. However, what vital place does sanctuary imagery play today in our daily and church worship services?

**Summary:** The Psalms give voice to the heart cries of seekers after God in a living dialogue of pleas, assurance, blessing, praise, and celebration.
Judgment From His Sanctuary

While many psalms were written for public worship, many others are prayers of personal distress and suffering. These laments typically contain a description of the problem, the sufferer’s plea for help, and an affirmation of, and reasons for, the writer’s trust in God.

In Psalm 73, the petitioner is angry that the wicked prosper and are at ease while he suffers injustice.

Read the psalmist’s complaint in Psalm 73. What happened that brought about a change in his attitude toward the problem? What message can we take from this for ourselves, as Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the truths about God and the plan of salvation that this ministry reveals? See Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 25, 26.

Judgment in the Psalms, as in the Bible as a whole, is a double-edged sword: deserved punishment on the wicked and the defense of the oppressed and humble (Pss. 7:9, 10; 9:7–12; 75:2; 94:1–3, 20–22; 98:9). In Psalm 68:24, the wicked are pictured as watching God enter the sanctuary in a grand processional. God’s throne, representing justice and mercy, is symbolized in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. Thus, the sanctuary, the place of worship, becomes a haven of refuge for the distressed.

Here, too, we see the theme of judgment echoed in the first angel’s message: “Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come . . .” (Rev. 14:7). One of the things that makes God so worthy of our worship is that we can indeed trust that in the end, not only will judgment come but it will be just and righteous, nothing like the fallible and imperfect justice meted out even in the best human courts. From the death of Abel, whose blood cried out from the ground (Gen. 4:10), up through today and on to the last day of fallen human history, the crimes, the unfairness, and the inequities of this world do indeed cry out for justice. The good news is that we can trust that, in His time and way, God will make all things right, however hard it is for us to see and understand now (see 1 Cor. 4:5).

Have you seen injustice? Have you been the victim of injustice? In what ways can you learn to trust in God, to trust in the promise of ultimate and righteous justice that is so lacking in the world now?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Psalms help us to dialogue with God through the structures and imagery of poetry, regarding such issues as injustice, betrayal, judgment, and history, as well as praise for His created world and celebration of His Lordship. Poetry and music are especially apt avenues for private and collective worship experiences.

Just for Teachers: Use the following exercise to help your class to explore the value of word imagery and poetry in communicating truths of God.

Opening Activity: William Wordsworth defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility.” Poetry is language compressed into a form that communicates a great deal to our hearts and minds with few words. Much of the power of poetry comes from sensory images that we associate with whole experiences. For example, when Psalm 19:4–6 refers to the sun as a new husband leaping from his honeymoon bed or as a champion joyfully racing to the finish line, we have a picture of the sun as a strong, deeply happy man, full of life and ready to take on the world. When this image is associated with the Word of God, His power, energy, and glory spreading everywhere, warming the earth even in silent majesty, a fresh new picture of God is presented to our senses. When this image is extended to a description of God’s law, we are better able to understand a very abstract concept that in some contexts is scary and threatening.

Consider This: Divide your class into five groups and assign each group several verses from Psalm 19:7–14. (Encourage the use of several versions, if possible. The Message is especially good.) Ask each group to draw pictures (or mime an illustration) that demonstrate what the law of God is like, as described in their section of verses. Collect the pictures or ask those who are acting out a demonstration to come up front. Ask the class to discuss these images and how they enrich their understanding of the Creator as lawgiver.

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: One possible means of presenting the following material is to divide it among five groups. Ask each group to discuss the
“Like the Beasts That Perish”

As we saw yesterday, and as we all know too well, so much unfairness and injustice reign in this world. A relatively small percentage of people live in luxury, in contrast to vast multitudes who struggle to barely eke out an existence. The gap between the rich and poor seems to grow steadily; and what makes it worse is that so often the rich get richer by exploiting the poor. All through the Bible, the Lord has warned about this exploitation and injustice. Those who are guilty of such exploitation, and who do not repent and turn away, will have a lot to answer for on Judgment Day.

Read Psalm 49. How does this tie in with what we read yesterday? What is the basic message of this psalm? Where do we find the gospel here? What ultimate and final hope is presented?

It is so easy to get caught up in the things of this world, especially if you have many things in this world as do the rich. Yet, as the psalm says, and as we all should know by now, the things of this world are so fleeting, so temporary, so easily lost. Overnight, everything for which you have worked, everything you have struggled to attain, everything that is important to you, can be taken away, lost, destroyed. We all live on the edge of a precipice, at least in this life. Fortunately, as this psalm shows, and as so much of the rest of the Bible attests, this life is not all that there is.

Focus on verses 7–9 of this psalm. Given the immediate context, what is it saying? How does it show how all of us, rich or poor, are ultimately dependent upon Christ for salvation?

Do you ever find yourself jealous of those who have more than you do? If so, why is it so important to surrender those feelings to the Lord? How do such emotions interfere with your spiritual life, with your relationship to God, and your faith in general? How can focusing on Jesus, the Cross, and salvation help to free you from the tyranny of jealousy?
theme assigned to them and then find a piece of music in the hymnal that will illustrate their theme. Be sure to reserve enough class time for each group to present their findings to the class. You may choose to use concrete representations for what may seem like a list of abstract concepts dealt with in Psalms to help your class members identify with these concepts. For example, a leaf or rock can illustrate the theme of nature, and a simple musical instrument can illustrate praise and celebration.

Bible Commentary

I. Creator of the Natural World (Review Psalms 65, 104, and 139:13–18 with your class.)

The natural world is a place where we often go to see God’s presence and power. Paul, in Romans 1:20, acknowledges that everyone can see God’s invisible attributes in creation, and that this leaves no one with the excuse that they couldn’t know God and give Him glory. Dwelling on what God has done, as reflected in the beautiful surroundings of His creation, awakens awe and amazement in God’s creative power, appreciation of His sense of beauty and perfection, and joy in His generous gifts.

According to Ellen White, Christ, even as a boy, loved to take His few hours of leisure and spend them in nature, communing with His Father, praying, studying Scripture, and singing praises. He was happy, surrounded by nature’s beauty and blessings. “How lovely is Your tabernacle,” we can almost hear Him sing, “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord. . . . Even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself, . . . even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, My King and my God” (Ps. 84:1–3, NKJV).

Consider This: What aspects of the natural world are most impressive to you and inspire you to sing? How does recounting our appreciation for God’s creation inspire communal faith?

II. Justice and Judgment (Review Psalms 49, 73, 120, and 139 with your class.)

At times, a beautiful praising hymn, such as Psalm 139, is interrupted with passionate outbursts against the wicked. Arresting is the image of David singing beautiful lyrical verse about God’s goodness and presence at every turn, even on the “wings of the morning,” and then suddenly erupting into
Worship and the Sanctuary

“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps. 141:2). What imagery is being used here? To what is this verse pointing?

The entire Old Testament sanctuary service centered around the concept of sacrifice. However much the enemy of souls perverted it, even to the point where people were sacrificing their own children in order (they believed) to appease an angry god (or gods), the sacrificial system was intended to point to the death of Jesus on behalf of all humanity. It was to show the futility of using our own works to save us; it was to show that the cost of sin was the life of an innocent victim; it was to show that the Lord had a plan whereby sinners could be forgiven, cleansed, and accepted by the Lord through His grace.

It is no wonder, then, that many of the psalms, so central to Israel’s worship, would use images and examples from the sanctuary service. See Pss. 20:3, 43:4, 51:19, 54:6, 118:27, 134:2, 141:2.

Dwell on the sanctuary service: the sacrifice of the animals, the ministry of the priests, the furniture in the courtyard, and the Holy and Most Holy Places. What sacred truths can we draw from this earthly and temporary system about the work of Jesus on our behalf? Why should these truths be so central to our worship of the Lord?

Read Psalm 40:6–8 and Hebrews 10:1–13. How does Paul connect Psalm 40:8 with the sacrificial system?

The author’s point is that it is through Christ, not through the death of animals, that we have salvation. Only through Christ is there true forgiveness of sin. The whole earthly system was merely a precursor to what Jesus would do on behalf of all humanity. He was telling his audience, most likely Jewish believers in Jesus, that they needed to look away from the earthly system and instead focus their attention and worship on Jesus. In other words, though the whole sanctuary service was to point to Christ, as believers they needed to move away from the symbols toward the reality, which was Jesus and His ministry for them in the heavenly sanctuary after His atoning death.

How can we be sure that we do not make worship and the things of worship ends in themselves? How can we make sure that every aspect of our worship points us toward Jesus and His work on our behalf?
passionate outcries against evildoers. “Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!” he declares. “Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You?” (Ps. 139:19, 21, NKJV). Then, in another swift turn of thought, David ends his hymn with a fervent plea for God to search His heart and eradicate any evil that might be lurking there.

It seems that David is just as fervent in his hatred of the wicked as he is in his love of God. While this may jar our sensibilities at first, there is great assurance in God’s determination to deal justly with evil. David found not only beauty and peace in the wilderness but protection and security from evil. He not only longed for peace and safety but did what he could to bring about God’s style of justice and security for everyone in his kingdom. David and the other psalmists recognized that, as God’s servants, we must identify with Him and assist in His work of healing oppression, rather than identify with wicked men and their work of destruction.

**Consider This:** What is intended by the assurances that justice and judgment will be dealt to the wicked? Why is this theme an important one for corporate worship?

### III. History (Review Psalms 78, 106, and 114 with your class.)

God gave Moses a song to teach the people just before he died. It was a lengthy recitation of how God had delivered Israel, their many rebellions, and the lessons they had learned about God’s character during their years of wandering in the desert. (See Deuteronomy 31:15–32:47.) On another occasion, after the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, Ezra organized a fast for repentance, and the Levites sang a similar recitation of God’s dealings with His people (Nehemiah 9). In both circumstances Israel had come to the end of a bitter exile from their land and were poised at the crossroads that promised a new beginning. It was a critical time to review their history.

These recitations were not the stories of individuals; they were the stories of how a people had come to be in the place where they were. They were shared histories. There was great danger in forgetting what God had done and the lessons that had been learned at such great cost. There would be no new beginning, unless these lessons were fresh in their minds and hearts.

**Consider This:** Why is it important that God’s people today recite the history they have shared with God’s people throughout the ages? What important threshold do we stand upon today that makes it critical for us to keep God’s history lessons fresh in our minds?
Lest We Forget!

Three of the longer psalms, Psalms 78, 105, and 106, are great hymns that were to be sung or recited to remind Israel of God’s leading in the past.

Read Psalm 78:1–8. According to this passage, why does God want the people to remember their history? Read also Deut. 6:6–9, 1 Cor. 10:11. How can we take that same principle and apply it to ourselves in our own context and experience, which is so different from theirs?

One of the ways God reveals Himself is through history. Yet, each generation must experience Him anew based on that history. For that reason, not only music but the proclamation of the Word of God in worship is vital to both old and new generations so that they may keep before them His past leading. Psalm 78 is a warning that history must not repeat itself, but at the same time it is a heartwarming reminder of God’s gracious dealings with His wayward people. There seems to be an urgency in the imperative promise, “Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength” (vs. 4, NKJV). Psalm 105:2 calls us to “Sing psalms to Him” and “Talk of all His wondrous works” (NKJV; emphasis added).

The longest poem in the psalter, Psalm 119, contains the frequent refrain, “Teach me thy statutes,” indicating the importance of Scripture as the basis for teaching godly living and righteousness. Paul echoes this thought when he instructs the young preacher, Timothy, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction” (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV).

Paul charges Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2, NKJV). To neglect to proclaim the Word in worship is to dilute the power of the gospel to reach hearts, to change lives, and to enrich the worship experience of believers.

How often have you had the experience of the Lord doing something wonderful and miraculous in your life, only to quickly forget it and show fear and lack of faith when a new crisis arose? Whether in corporate worship or in your own private worship, how can you learn to keep fresh in your mind God’s leading in your life? Why is this so important to do?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following activities to help to bring the practical applications of the themes of the Psalms home to your class members.

1. Listen to the songs that were written by class members during the past week.

2. What deliverance experiences does your community share? Discuss these experiences and then divide your class in two, to read responsively no. 728 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, “Let the Redeemed Thank the Lord,” derived from Psalm 107. How does it feel to read from the Scriptures together? Why is coming together as a community to rejoice in deliverance such a valuable worship experience?

3. How often do you experience a variety of the themes presented in the Psalms in your worship services today? How often do you use responsive readings (present in the back of *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*) in your church? Discuss together how you as a class might increase the opportunities available in your church services to use the Psalms, poetry, and music drawn from Scriptures or from your own experiences.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Suggest the following ideas to help your class to put the class discussion into practice during the following weeks or months.

1. Write your own version of Psalm 136 using major events in your life as milestones that illustrate how “His love endures forever.” Share this psalm with a family member who has a similar life history and who needs an extra boost toward faith this week.

2. Choose five psalms that deal with nature. Read one of these psalms before you go on a walk each day, and meditate on these scriptures as you take your daily exercise in the week ahead.

3. What special deliverances has your family experienced? Plan a few activities to celebrate God’s deliverance in your life, such as a meal of remembrance or the creation of a family album or wall hanging commemorating God’s goodness to you.

4. Rewrite a few portions of some of the sanctuary imagery in Psalms in light of the “new and living way” that has been opened for us to approach God. Share them with the rest of the class.

“The Book of Psalms fulfills a unique role in the Bible. . . . [The Psalms] function in the Scriptures as the heartbeat of Israel’s religion. In this book of prayers the covenant people found their stairway to heaven. It reaches from the lowest depths of human agony and suffering to the highest joys of communion with God. Laments and cries of despair exchange with hymns of thanksgiving and praise. . . . This living interchange between man and God is perhaps the deeper reason why the Book of Psalms has been cherished as the invaluable jewel in the Hebrew Bible by seekers after God in all ages.” Further, they are a “disclosure of God’s own heart. . . . They stand as inspired examples of how God desires us all to respond by faith to the authentic revelations of Himself and of His deeds in the books of Moses.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 3, 4.

Discussion Questions:

1. It is one thing to trust in the justice of God’s ultimate judgment at the end of time—we have to trust in that hope and promise. At the same time, does this mean that we do not need to work for justice and judgment now because we know that it will ultimately come by God? How do we strike a right balance between seeking justice now and knowing that one day it will come?

2. Further discuss the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson regarding worship and the forms of worship in church. How is it possible that things such as music, preaching, liturgy, and so forth could become ends in themselves as opposed to being the means of pointing us toward the Lord? So often we can mistake the symbols for the reality behind the symbols. How can we protect ourselves against this danger in our own worship services?
**Lesson 8**  
*August 13–19*

**Conformity, Compromise,**  
**and Crisis in Worship**

**Sabbath Afternoon**

**Read for This Week’s Study:**  

**Memory Text:**  
“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14, NKJV).

In 1954, novelist William Golding wrote *The Lord of the Flies,* a fictional account of a group of English children stranded on a deserted island after a plane crash. Golding used this story as a modern parable about the inherent evil in human beings. What made the narrative so powerful was that he used children, supposedly the essence of innocence, to make his point about just how corrupt, evil, egotistical, and violent humanity is at heart.

Christians, of course, would say, So tell us something we don’t know. Human evil and sinfulness are part and parcel of the Christian message. The Bible is unambiguous on that point. But while the idea that evil is bad is quite uncontroversial, what is not so uncontroversial is the question, “What is evil?” Not everyone agrees on that.

This week, as we continue to look at the question of worship, we are going to look at a certain kind of evil that has brought devastating consequences to God’s people and to humanity in general. We can view what this evil did to ancient Israel, but we need to ask the important question about just how susceptible we are to it ourselves.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.*
In Different Eyes

Read** the following texts. What is the one point that they all have in common? Why is it so important for us to always keep this in mind? *Gen. 6:5, Jer. 17:5, John 2:25, Rom. 3:9–12. What kind of things exist in your culture that could cause you to forget this fundamental truth?* 

All through Scripture we are warned: the human heart is deceitful; people are corrupt; do not look to others; no one is immune from evil. With the exception, of course, of Jesus, who never sinned, few characters to whom the Bible pays much attention are pictured as morally unscathed.

One does not need Scripture, either, to see just how corrupt humanity is. History, newspapers, the daily news, indeed, even our homes, and at times our own hearts should suffice to show us the morally decrepit state of humanity. What should be scary for us to remember is that if a perfect being, as Lucifer originally was, could choose evil, even in the perfect environment of heaven, and if other perfect beings, as Adam and Eve were, could choose evil, even in the perfect environment of Eden—then what about ourselves? We are born with corrupt and fallen natures, and we carry those natures with us in a fallen and corrupted environment. No wonder that evil comes so easily, so naturally, to us. It is wired in our genes.

We have to be careful, however, in our understanding of what evil is. Some things are so manifestly evil, so manifestly bad, that anyone—whether a believer in God or not—would deem them to be evil. Evil, however, can be much more subtle. Things that the world or our culture and our society might view as fine, as normal, as just the way things are, could be precisely what the Bible condemns as wrong, sinful, even evil.

**Contrast Deuteronomy 12:8 with Deuteronomy 13:18. What crucial difference is being made here? Why is this difference so important for us to understand? What are some things that your own society does not condemn that are clearly condemned by the Bible? More important, how much has society impacted you and the church in regard to these issues? That is, what things clearly condemned in Scripture might the church take too lightly, directly as a result of the influence of society? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Kings 18:21

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Recognize how subtly following what is right in our own eyes can compromise true worship, and how critical it is to be devoted to God’s careful and precise direction.

- **Feel:** Sense the depravity of worship that rests on emotionality rather than on “Thus says the Lord.”

- **Do:** Respond to the Elijah message that calls for repentance, obedience, and true worship.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: The Slippery Slope of Compromise**

   A. How did Solomon and Jeroboam start the people of Israel down the slope of compromise? What were the consequences of these compromises in the subsequent history of Israel?

   B. How did God, through Elijah’s message on Mount Carmel, help Israel to refocus on critical elements of true worship?

II. **Feel: True Devotion Versus Emotional Display**

   A. What were the hallmarks of emotional display exhibited by the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel?

   B. How did Elijah model true devotion?

   C. What other examples of persons displaying true emotion in worship can you find in the Scriptures? When have you experienced appropriate emotions in worship?

III. **Do: Elijah’s Call**

   A. Why is Elijah’s message so appropriate today?

   B. What is God calling you to do in response to this message?

   C. What is the call to the church of today?

**Summary:** Compromise between our own inclinations and God’s clear direction can lead to false worship, but Elijah’s message calls us to repentance, obedience, and worship of the one true God.
The Art (and Evil) of Compromise

Politics, it has been said, is the art of compromise. The word *art* in this instance is very important, for compromise can be a very subtle, nuanced action on the part of the person doing it. A good politician is someone who can get the people to concede points, to compromise positions, and often not even realize that they are doing just that. In this context, then, there is no doubt that Satan is the best politician around.

All through the Bible, we find examples of this evil—the evil of compromise. Not that every compromise is evil, of course not. In a certain sense, life itself is a kind of compromise. Instead, compromise becomes another manifestation of human evil and corruption when those who should know better fall away from the truth that God has given to them.

For example . . .

**Read** 1 Kings 11:1–13. What happened here? How did this happen? What was it about Solomon that made his actions here so bad? How did this apostasy impact worship, faith, and the whole religious system of Israel? Also, and most important, what lessons can we draw for ourselves today from this episode and the whole question of compromise?

Perhaps the most revealing phrase in this block of texts is the statement that it was “when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). In other words, it did not happen overnight. The faithful, dedicated, and godly man revealed in the Bible did not suddenly, out of nowhere, turn away from the Lord. Instead, the change happened bit by bit, over time; a little compromise here, a little there, each step taking him further and further from where he should have been until he was doing something that the Solomon of his earlier years no doubt would have been horrified to see.

Look, too, at what his compromises did to worship in Israel. They had a negative impact that would last for generations and beyond.

Every now and then you hear stories about people who left the Seventh-day Adventist Church years ago, severed ties with it completely, and then came back, only to be shocked by some of the changes that they saw in areas such as theology, standards, and worship. Though that might not be bad in every case, it might very well be bad in some. How can we know the difference?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The call of God requires us to love Him with everything we possess—heart, soul, mind, and strength.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson explores the dangers of half-hearted worship. Whether one is led astray by the clamor for conformity to worldly standards or accepts a spirituality free of biblical imperatives, spiritual compromise destroys one’s connection with God. Share the following anecdote in your own words.

**Opening Activity:** This somewhat apocryphal story captures the notion of compromise. As the story is told, a family from New York purchased a large farm out West with the intention of raising cattle. They bought the land, set up the ranch, and started on their dream. Months later, some curious friends visited the family and asked the would-be cattleman if he planned to name the ranch.

“I wanted to name it the Bar-J,” he responded, “my wife favored Suzy-Q, one son liked the Flying-W, and the other wanted the Lazy-Y. So we’re calling it the Bar-J-Suzy-Q-Flying-W-Lazy-Y.”

“But where are all your cattle?” the friends asked.

“None survived the branding.”

**Consider This:** Discuss with your students some of the pros and cons of compromise in different areas of life, such as relationships, politics, or work. Ask your students to share a compromise that they later regretted.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** The goal of this Explore section is to examine the human tendency to stray from God’s dictates and think about how to remedy that tendency. At every level of one’s walk with God there will be a call to surrender attitudes, habits, norms, convictions, opinions, and so on. This is the narrow road that leads to life eternal. In this section explore this “pull and tug” of the Christian’s journey with your class.
Counterfeit Worship

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

Unfortunately, Jeroboam listened only to what he wanted to hear and he forgot the conditions of success. He was all too ready to lead in the revolt (1 Kings 12:16–20), and almost immediately he took steps to prevent his subjects from returning to Jerusalem to worship.

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

Look at the account of Jeroboam’s setting up a counterfeit religion that would eventually separate Israel from the worship of the true God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25–33). Notice how this new worship resembled the worship of the true God and at the same time contradicted most of the clear counsel of Yahweh:

1. Offered sacrifices and ordained non-Levite priests (vss. 31–33)
2. Made calves of gold to worship (vs. 28)
3. Made Bethel a place of worship (vs. 29)
4. Made Dan a place of worship (vs. 29)
5. Instituted a rival feast to the Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 32)
6. Built shrines on high places (vs. 31)

Counterfeit money cannot deceive unless it looks like the real thing. In the same way, Jeroboam knew that his false worship must have many of the same elements of worship to which the people were accustomed, though he eventually declared, pointing to the golden calves, “‘Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” (vs. 28, NKJV).

It is so easy from our perspective today to look back and wonder, How could they have fallen into such blatant apostasy? On the other hand, humans have an incredible capacity to deceive themselves (it is all part of our fallen and corrupted nature), and we deceive ourselves if we think that we are not just as vulnerable as humans were back then. Look at yourself, your lifestyle, your mode of worship. What might you be doing that is, in principle, not much different from what happened here? How willing are you to make changes, if need be?
Bible Commentary

I. God’s Conditions (Review Deuteronomy 6:4–9 with your class.)

Monday’s study captures the subtle nature of compromise, the nuanced acceptance of worldly norms, and the spiritual devastation that usually follows. God is keenly aware of the stealthy nature of evil, especially in those who profess His name. Perhaps this is why He rarely imparts a blessing without strict directions on how to “stay blessed.”

As Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses urged them to love God with all their strength (Deut. 6:5). In Deuteronomy 6:18 he urges total obedience “that it may go well with you” (NIV). But Moses also made some other things clear to the Israelites:

• You will be blessed if you obey all (Deut. 6:24, 25).
• God will keep His covenant to you if you obey His commands (Deut. 7:12).
• You will be destroyed if you forget the God who delivered you and start worshiping other gods (Deut. 8:19).
• Your lands and livestock will be blessed if you obey God’s commands (Deut. 11:13–15).

The list of God’s conditional promises is long. God always clarifies His requirements, because He knows that sinful human beings are prone to forget them.

Consider This: Because we serve a God who jealously guards the sanctity of His dictates, why should we place the utmost priority on knowing what those dictates require of us? Acts 17:30 makes it clear that God does not hold us responsible for what we do not know. Nonetheless, knowing the requirements of God is essential, because it serves as a bulwark against compromise with, and conformity to, the world and its ways.

II. Knowing and Doing (Review 1 Kings 12:25–33 with your class.)

The curious case of Jeroboam reveals the challenges we sometimes face between knowing what is right and doing it. As the lesson makes clear, Jeroboam fancied himself a “worship guru,” a spiritual innovator not bound by the rules of worship handed down to Israel by God (Exodus 25–31).
Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Things went from bad to worse in the north, especially when it came to the question of worship under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. It is against this background (see 1 Kings 17–19) that we come to the famous story of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Here, we can see just how far compromise had taken them.

Read 1 Kings 18. Notice the difference between the “worship styles” of Elijah and these false prophets. What lessons might we take away that could be relevant for ourselves today and the whole question of worship?

It must have been quite a scene: these prophets of Baal wailing, leaping, crying (who knows what kind of music might have accompanied their ritual), prophesying, even cutting themselves and spilling their own blood as part of their worship of Baal. These were certainly hyped-up people, full of zeal and passion for their faith and their god, a zeal and passion that testified to the sincerity of their beliefs.

Today, too, some Christian worship services could remind one at times of something like this: a lot of emotion, a lot of hype, and a lot of noise. Though we want to avoid worship services that remind people of funerals, we also do not want worship services that remind them of priests of Baal at Mount Carmel either. Some seem to think that the more sounds they make, the louder the music, the more emotional excitement generated, the better the worship service. Yet, that is not what worship is about.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from this account is that all worship must be focused on the true Lord, on the Creator. True worship needs to be grounded in the Word of God, pointing the worshiper to the Lord and His activity in history. In contrast to all the bedlam of the priests of Baal, Elijah prayed a simple prayer, “ ‘Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God’ ” (vs. 37). This was no Elijah show. It was about worshiping the true God in contrast to any and all false ones, regardless of the form they take.

Our worship services should always present worshipers with the question that Elijah asked Israel: “ ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him’ ” (vs. 21, NIV). Our worship experience should force us to look inside our hearts and see where our true love and devotion are: on the Lord or on anything else.
Jeroboam’s counterfeit worship was driven by something far more insidious than what might appear on the surface. Ellen G. White notes, “Jeroboam’s greatest fear was that at some future time the hearts of his subjects might be won over by the ruler occupying the throne of David. He reasoned that if the ten tribes should be permitted to visit often the ancient seat of the Jewish monarchy, where the services of the temple were still conducted as in the years of Solomon’s reign, many might feel inclined to renew their allegiance to the government centering at Jerusalem.”—Prophets and Kings, p. 99.

Did you get that? Jeroboam’s fear of abandonment, coupled with a lust for power and prestige, short-circuited his obedience to God. Often it’s not the pressures from without that lead us to cast off God; it’s the machinations within our hearts that find expression in dark compromises.

Notice the extent to which Jeroboam distorted the true worship of God. There is a sense here that once he began to compromise, there was no letting up. He led the ten tribes of Israel into an ever-deepening pit of idolatry that would not be eradicated for hundreds of years.

Consider This: If time permits, ask someone in the class to read Jeremiah 17:9. Ask the class to pick out some of the key words and phrases in this scripture. Notice that the prophet Jeremiah says that the unregenerated human heart is deceitful “above all things, and desperately wicked” (NKJV). It’s not just wicked, but “desperately” wicked. Desperate is a strong characterization. It denotes something beyond hope, something suffering extreme need, or something involving extreme danger or possible disaster. What does this say about our natural condition and our ability to renew ourselves in our own power? What is our only hope for renewal?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Conformity and compromise with the world often lead to crisis. Distribute 3 by 5 index cards and pencils to your class members. List the following Bible characters and ask the class to identify the area of compromise or conformity in each life and how it affected each character’s worship of God.

- Cain
- Samson
- Jezebel
- Jacob
- Eli

CONTINUED
The Elijah Message

“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Mal. 3:18).

For all the drama, Elijah’s confrontation with the 150 prophets on Mount Carmel boiled down to one question for the people gathered there with them: “‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him’” (1 Kings 18:21, NIV). However specific the context was, the question is one that each individual must answer for herself or himself: Do we worship and follow the true God or not? We might be able to “waver between two opinions” 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 is over, all humanity will have been forever divided into one of two classes: “between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Mal. 3:18). As Jesus so bluntly and clearly said: “‘He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth’” (Luke 11:23). How much plainer could He be?


Just as John the Baptist, whom Jesus referred to as “Elijah” (Matt. 17:11–13), had a message of reformation, repentance, and obedience, Malachi makes it clear (Mal. 4:1, 5) that “Elijah” will again come just before the end of sin and evil. The book of Revelation proclaims to the last generation a message of warning, a call to obedience, and a call to worship the Creator God. As with Elijah on Carmel, people will in a very dramatic way have to make the most important choice of their lives, a choice that is filled with truly eternal consequences. The good news is that, even before these final events unfold, we can make daily choices that will greatly prepare us to be on the Lord’s side when the climactic battle between good and evil unfolds among the nations.

Think about the daily choices you’ve made (perhaps in the past few days), even regarding the smallest of things (see Luke 16:10). Judging by those choices (and the compromises that might be manifest in those choices), which of the two sides are you choosing? Dwell on the implications of your answer.


**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

- Judas
- David
- Achan

**Consider This:** In what ways do we sometimes compromise our standards in the same areas? What are the results?

**Thought Questions:**

1. According to Jeremiah 17:9, we humans have heart trouble of the most dire sort. How can we keep from compromising God’s standards when we have a heart and nature that sabotages us from within?

2. Psalm 119:9 explains how to keep one’s way pure “by taking heed according to Your word” (*NKJV*). Verse 11 enlarges on this theme. The Word hidden in one’s heart helps to prevent sin from taking root. If God’s Word is powerful enough to keep our way pure and free of dangerous compromises and to prevent us from falling, why do we continue to sin when we know what is right?

**Application Questions:**

1. How does your personal walk with God impact your corporate worship of God? Do you come in search of something from God, or do you enter God’s presence with something to give to God? Discuss.

2. This week’s lesson touched on the entertainment ethic prevalent in some worship services today. What can you do to help your church avoid the dangers of “seeker-dominated” worship styles?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Ask your students to turn over their 3 by 5 index cards and write down one problem area of their lives in which they are not following God’s commands completely. (Alternately, you can ask them just to think about the area, without disclosing what it is.) After each member is finished, allow a minute for silent prayer. Invite each class member to ask God for the strength to yield this area of his or her life to God. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving.

“The apostasy prevailing today is similar to that which in the prophet’s day overspread Israel.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 170.

“God has many thousands [in this age] who have not bowed the knee to Baal . . . [and] many who have been worshiping Baal ignorantly, but with whom the Spirit of God is still striving.”—Page 171.

A. W. Tozer, a well-known preacher of the twentieth century (he died in 1963), often preached against the worship of the “god of entertainment,” suggesting that no matter how hard they try, churches cannot compete with the world’s idea of entertainment. It is the cross of Jesus Christ, says Tozer, not entertainment, that will win souls to Christ. See A. W. Tozer, Tozer On Worship and Entertainment, compiled by James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, Penn.: Wing Spread Publishers, 1997), pp. 108, 109.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class discuss your answer to Sunday’s question. How much has your society impacted the church’s views on the moral issues of the day?

2. The descriptions of Baal worship hint that it was highly entertaining, which could help explain its popularity. How can we restore the sense of awe and reverence of God in our worship, rather than encourage expectations of being 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, and in what ways not? 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.

4. Think about how drastically the nation of Israel fell into apostasy. Again, none of this happened overnight. The devil, if nothing else, is patient. How can we protect ourselves individually, and the church as a whole, from slowly but surely going the same way as Israel?
“Trust Not in Deceptive Words”: The Prophets and Worship

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Mic. 6:1–8, Isa. 6:1–8, Isa. 1:11–15, Isa. 58:1–10, Isaiah 44, Jer. 7:1–10.

Memory Text: “Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come” (Isaiah 44:7, NIV).

In his story Fathers and Sons, Russian author Ivan Turgenev put these words into the mouth of a character: “The life of each of us hangs by a thread, an abyss may gape beneath us any minute, and yet we go out of our way to cook up all sorts of trouble for ourselves and to mess up our lives.”—Fathers and Sons (New York: Signet Classics, 2005), p. 131.

Of course, the Lord offers a better way to live. He offers us the opportunity to follow Him, to love Him, to worship Him, and hence, to spare ourselves many of the problems that we would otherwise bring upon ourselves.

Yet, merely professing to follow the Lord is not what the Christian life is about. This week we will look at what a few prophets said about those who thought that their “worship” of the true God, in the true temple on the true Sabbath day, was all that mattered, regardless of how they lived the rest of the week. As the prophets show, this is a deception, a good way to “cook up all sorts of trouble for ourselves.”

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.
A Thousand Rams?

Unlike every other religion, the religion of the Bible (both Testaments) teaches that salvation is by grace alone. Nothing we do can ever make us good enough to be accepted by God. Our good deeds, however well-intended, however Spirit-inspired, can never bridge the gap that sin has caused between God and humanity. If good works could save us, atone for sin, pay our debt before God, and reunite fallen humanity with the Creator, then Jesus never would have had to die for us, and the plan of salvation would be something radically different from what it is.

Only the death of Jesus credited to us by faith, only the righteousness of Christ (which He wrought out in His life and is then given to all who truly accept it) can save the sinner. Sin is so bad, so contrary to the basic principles of God’s government, which is based on love and free choice, that nothing less than the death of Christ could solve the problem created by sin.

All that being said, the Bible is clear that what we say, what we do, and what we think all matter, and that these thoughts and actions reveal the reality of our experience with God.

With the above in mind, read Micah 6:1–8. What point is the prophet making here, especially in regard to the question of the sacrifices (part of the worship service in Israel), that is symbolic of the plan of salvation? How can these words be applied to us today? See also Deut. 10:12, 13.

Those who claim to be children of God but who fail to show justice and mercy to their fellow men are acting out the spirit of Satan no matter how piously they may adhere to the forms of worship. On the other hand, those who walk humbly with their God will not neglect the principles of justice and mercy, nor will they scorn the proper forms of worship. God is looking for true worshipers who are willing to demonstrate their love for Him by obedient lives, motivated by humble hearts. What do all the right prayers, all the right styles of worship, and all the right theology mean if the person is nasty, unkind, arrogant, unjust, and unmerciful to others?

What do you think is more important: correct theology or correct action? Can you have your theology right and yet treat others in a poor manner? What hope can you cling to if, perhaps, you see yourself revealed in the above texts?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Micah 6:7, 8

The Student Will:

Know: Describe the essence of what God requires of us before He will accept our acts of worship.
Feel: Share in Isaiah’s sense of unworthiness, his longing for cleansing, and his desire to serve as he stood before an almighty, holy, and glorious God.
Do: Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Learning Outline:
I. Know: God Sees Through Hypocrisy

A Although God instituted many rituals of worship, including sacrifice, what was it about Israel’s behavior and lifestyle that often made these God-designed rituals meaningless?
B What about our actions demonstrates that we are truly penitent and obedient when we come before God in worship? Why is service to others in poverty and oppression a critical aspect of worship?

II. Feel: Woe Is Me

A How does truly recognizing God’s glory, creative power, and redeeming love cause us to feel in His presence?
B What should our attitude be as we respond to God’s presence and call to serve?

III. Do: Justice, Mercy, and Humble Service

A What do we need to do on a daily basis for those who are in need around us?
B How can we support the church in its service to the local and world community?

Summary: When we truly sense the presence of God, we will require, like Isaiah, soul cleansing. Then we may accept His call to dwell humbly with Him, serving all whom He places in our path with due justice and compassionate mercy.
The Call of Isaiah

While Hosea, Amos, and Micah were warning Israel of their imminent danger, Judah seemed to be prospering under the reign of several good kings. King Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was known and respected among the nations for his wise leadership and accomplishments (see 2 Chron. 26:1–15). But, as often happens, his success became his downfall. Humility was replaced by pride and devotion by presumption (see vss. 16–21).

The people of Judah appeared to be prospering spiritually, as well. The temple services were well-attended with a formality of religious fervor. Yet, many of the same evils that afflicted the people of Israel were fast corrupting the kingdom of Judah. It is at this time that the Lord calls Isaiah to His special work.

Read Isaiah 6:1–8. Why do you think Isaiah would respond as he did (vs. 5) upon seeing a vision of the Lord? What important theological truth is revealed here?

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Try to imagine Isaiah’s overwhelming reaction to this heavenly revelation of the glory of God. Suddenly he sees his own sins and the sins of his people standing out in bold relief against the spotless purity and the majestic holiness of Almighty God. No wonder he reacted as he did! It is hard to imagine anyone doing otherwise.

Here we see played out before us a crucial and foundational truth regarding the state of humanity, especially in contrast to the holiness and glory of God. We see an attitude of repentance, of a willingness to acknowledge one’s own sinfulness, one’s own need of grace.

Think for a moment of what our worship services would be like were leaders to elicit in the worshipers a sense that they have been in the presence of our Holy God, which in turn makes them deeply aware of their own sinfulness and need of His saving grace and cleansing power. Imagine if the singing, the liturgy, the prayer, and the preaching worked together in a way to lead us each time to faith, to repentance, to cleansing, and to a willingness to cry out, “Here I am; send me.” That is what worship should be about.

Imagine yourself standing in the physical presence of Jesus. That is, if He was standing in the flesh right before you. What would your reaction be? What would you say? Or do? What about His promise to us in Matthew 28:20? What does that promise mean to us now, on a practical level?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Spiritual transformation is not complete until the day-to-day life bears the imprint of Jesus’ character. When religion of the head becomes religion of the head, hands, and feet, when profession finds expression in action, we possess the Savior’s character.

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following in your own words. Your students will probably identify with the truth that the act of doing can often change one’s mental perception of something.

There is a secret to dynamic living that many motivational speakers seek to convey to their listeners. To be sure, there is much in the motivational industry that is a mile wide and an inch deep, but this truth is a fact. What is it? The physical act of doing something can change one’s attitude about that thing.

The internalization of this secret separates great athletes from the rest, spectacular performers from merely talented ones. Anyone who achieves greatness in any endeavor knows that greatness surrenders only to hard work and consistent effort. To work hard consistently at a thing means that one has to bypass feelings and emotions regularly to achieve one’s goals. Here is where the “law of doing” comes in. From time to time, one may not feel like practicing his or her skill. But if a person presses forward and begins the practice, negative attitudes often fade. The “doing” helps to change the mental state.

**Consider This:** Ask class members whether or not they believe the “law of doing” really works. Extend the discussion to the spiritual realm. In what way is there a correlation? What role did “doing” play in the life of Jesus (John 8:29)? How does the repetition of doing what is right help to change who we are on the inside?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

CONTINUED
No More Vain Oblations

It is easy to forget that so much of the writing of the Old Testament, especially the writings of the prophets, was written as admonitions and warnings to God’s covenant people, to the ones who were His “true church.” Most of these people professed to follow the true God, had a basic understanding of biblical truths (at least much more than their heathen neighbors), and knew the right things to say and do in worship. Yet, as becomes very clear to anyone reading the prophets, all this was nowhere near enough.

Read Isaiah 1:11–15. How are we to understand what the Lord, who instituted all these services, is saying to them?

The answer is found, really, in the few verses that follow (Isa. 1:16–18), which in many ways is similar to what we saw in Sunday’s lesson on Micah. Without question, the church is for sinners, and if we had to wait until we were perfect before we could worship the Lord, then none of us would worship Him.

But that is not what the Bible is saying here or what it ever says. It is saying that God is more interested in how we treat others, especially the weak and helpless among us, than He is in all sorts of religious rituals, even the ones that He instituted.

Read Isaiah 58:1–10. What is wrong with the fasting described here? How does God say that the people should fast? What point can we take from this for ourselves, whether or not we fast?

Fasting is a form of self-denial about which Jesus had much to say. But some kinds of fasting are nothing but a vain show. Fasting can be a symptom of hypocrisy, coveting the privileges of obedience while detesting its responsibilities. Self-denial, motivated by love for God, ministers to those in need. This is the kind of fasting (self-denial) that honors Him. This is the kind of life that leads to the kind of worship that He does not despise, a worship that shows the sinner that, just as he or she has been the recipient of grace and undeserved love, so, too, must he or she dispense grace and undeserved love to others. That is the kind of self-denial that reveals true faith (Luke 9:23), the kind of self-denial at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
Learning Cycle  

**Just for Teachers:** As this week’s lesson makes clear, Old Testament prophets faced the difficult task of exposing the hidden, and not-so-hidden, sins of people who often claimed to be worshiping the true God.

**I. The View From Up There** *(Review Isaiah 6:1–8, 1 Samuel 16:7, and 2 Chronicles 16:9 with your class.)*

Monday’s lesson highlights one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture: Isaiah’s “interview” with God *(Isa. 6:1–8).* There is a clear sense in this passage that God knows Isaiah and the people of Judah better than they know themselves. Isaiah sees the seams of his life begin to tear as God reveals who He really is.

The searching eye of God saw the true condition of Adam and Eve after the Fall, even when they could scarcely grasp that condition themselves *(Gen. 3:11).* When Samuel picked Eliab, the strapping senior son of Jesse, to be king, God reminded him that He looks beyond outward appearance and clear into the heart *(1 Sam. 16:7).* When Asa, king of Israel, formed an alliance with Ben-hadad of Assyria, God sent this piercing word of reprimand: “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” *(2 Chron. 16:9, NKJV).*

King David asked the innocuous question, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” *(Ps. 139:7, NKJV).* This was a reality that David learned firsthand after his escapade with Bathsheba *(2 Samuel 12).* As professed followers of God, we must understand that no amount of self-delusion can change the reality of who we really are. God sees us as we are: sinners incapable of righting ourselves. Hiding is futile.

**Consider This:** Why do we tend to be afraid of God’s all-seeing eye? How can we “practice the presence” of God at all times so that it transforms the way in which we live?

**II. Repentance, Revival, and Reformation** *(Review Micah 6:8, Romans 2:4, and John 6:44 with your class.)*

The ancient rabbis looked into the law of God and discovered 613 precepts. Those 613 precepts are, in Psalm 15, reduced to 11 principles and, in Isaiah 33:15, lessened further to 6 commands. In Micah 6:8, God sums up the 613
Profitable for Nothing?

South African writer Laurens van der Post once wrote about what he called “the burden of meaninglessness,” this sense some people have that, when it was all said and done, what, if anything, did their lives mean? Sooner or later, they will be dead, and anyone who knew them will be dead, and before long all memory of them will be forever gone too. In such a scenario, what do our lives mean, what can they mean? How easy it can be to get the sense that so much of what we do has no real meaning, no real lasting importance.

With these thoughts in mind, read Isaiah 44. Then, on the lines below, summarize the essence of those verses, particularly as they relate to the question of worship and what people worship.

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However much Isaiah was writing for his time and culture and people, look at how relevant the principles are for us today. The Lord, He alone is the Creator, He alone is our Redeemer, He alone can save us; thus, He alone is worthy of our worship and our praise. Isaiah mocks those who create idols with their own hands, gods of their own making, and then bow down and worship them—things that are, indeed, “profitable for nothing.”

And yet, as silly and as foolish as all that seems to us, are we not in danger of doing something similar, of dedicating ourselves, our lives, our time, and our energy to things that, in the end, are “profitable for nothing,” that cannot answer the deepest need of our souls now, and that surely cannot redeem us from the grave at the end of time? How crucial it is that we watch and pray, that, as Paul said, we examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Sabbath worship, if done right, can remind us in a special way about why we should worship only the Lord. Worship should be a time that especially reminds us of what is important in life, what truly matters, and what is temporal, and even of what is “profitable for nothing.”

We all know the danger of making idols out of money, power, prestige, and so on. What about the danger of making idols out of things such as church, the pastor, our own ministries, or even our own faithfulness or lifestyle or piety? Think this through and bring your answer to class on Sabbath.
Learning Cycle  CONTINUED

precepts in 3 short requirements, which may be translated as be just in all you do; be kind, compassionate, and faithful; live a life of humility and submission to God.

To live the truth of Micah 6:8 requires a radical reordering of one’s life and priorities. This change can come only as one embraces God’s call to repentance, revival, and reformation. True repentance is godly sorrow for, and a turning away from, sin (Rom. 2:4, Ezek. 18:30–32). True revival is demonstrated by a renewal of the spiritual life (Ps. 85:6, Isa. 57:15, Rom. 6:11). Reformation is a reordering of priorities, a change in ideas, habits, and practices (Phil. 1:9, 10).

This transformation is the work of God. Romans 3:11 makes it clear that none of us seeks after God. God seeks after us. When we come to Him, it is in response to that divine seeking. In John 6:44 Jesus notes that no one comes to Him unless the Father draws him. Until God transforms us, there will be a separation between our profession and our actions.

Consider This: God is searching for worshipers who will worship Him both in spirit and in truth (John 4:21–23). How do repentance, revival, and reformation help us to worship God in truth? How do they help us to live the truth?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to internalize the questions below. The objective is for each person to take a hard look at himself or herself.

Thought Questions:

1. How do you respond when God tells you to change course in some area of your life, and why?
2. If you could take back one decision made against the clear direction of God, what would it be, and why?

Application Questions:

1. “Every man’s work passes in review before God and is registered for faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling.
“This Is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord. . . .”

The southern kingdom of Judah had its spiritual ups and downs, times of reform and times of outright apostasy. Yet so often, even during the worst spiritual times, there was an outward show of piety and worship that was not acceptable to the Lord. How careful we need to be not to fall into the same deception ourselves.

Read Jeremiah 7:1–10. What theme do we see repeated here that we have seen all week? How can we take the principles here and apply them to ourselves in our context today?

Look especially at verse 4. In one sense, the speakers were right. This was the “temple of the Lord,” the place where the Lord’s name was to dwell, the place where the sacrificial system—which God Himself had instituted—was performed, the place where the great truths of sacrifice, salvation, cleansing, and judgment were taught. After all, these were the covenant people. Their God was the true God, and they had more light and more truth, corporately, than was had by their pagan neighbors around them. None of this can be disputed, and yet, the Lord obviously was not pleased with them or their worship. In fact, He called out the words, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord”—what? “Deceptive words”? They were deceptive, not because that was not the temple of the Lord but because the people believed that simply by coming to the temple of the Lord and worshiping there ensured that they were safe, they were saved, they were doing all that was required.

With all the light that we have been given, in what way might we as Seventh-day Adventists be in danger of making the same mistake that these people made? Think through possible parallels between them and us and how, if we are not careful, we could fall into a similar deception. What possible “deceptive words” might we be in danger of trusting in, words that on the surface are true (just as that was, indeed, “the temple of the Lord”) and yet could lead us into making the same kind of presumptuous errors?
Heaven-sent warnings or reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all are chronicled by the recording angel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 482. The knowledge that every moment, good or bad, is recorded is daunting, especially when it feels as though the wasted moments and unimproved opportunities outweigh the good. Such a sobering thought is enough to tempt even the most staunchly faithful believer to give up all hope of heaven. But we can be so thankful that Heaven came to earth so that we could have hope of heaven—hope that took human form and died for all the sins recorded against us. Apart from Christ’s forgiveness for our past mistakes and sins, and His grace to empower us to live according to His will in the present, there is nothing good in us. Therefore, how should the question “How do I want my life record to read?” inspire us to conduct our lives?

If you were asked to finish the following statement, what would you say? “The main thing that hinders my fellowship with God is . . .”

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* Share the following ethical dilemmas with the class and elicit their responses. The objective of this exercise is to examine the challenges of living our faith in a world that often opposes that faith.

1. You are shopping and notice a woman stuffing a pair of stockings into her purse. You also notice that, based on her clothes, she probably has fallen on hard financial times. Do you report her? Discuss.

2. You run an orphanage and have had a hard time making ends meet. A car dealership offers you a new van worth $15,000 for free if you will falsely report to the government that the dealership donated a van worth $30,000. You really need the van, and it will give you an opportunity to make the children happy. Do you agree to take the van? Discuss.

“In Isaiah’s day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. . . .

“In losing sight of the true character of Jehovah, the Israelites were without excuse. Often had God revealed Himself to them as one ‘full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.’ Psalm 86:15.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 311, 312.

“In the vision that came to Isaiah in the temple court, he was given a clear view of the character of the God of Israel. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy,’ had appeared before him in great majesty; yet the prophet was made to understand the compassionate nature of his Lord. . . .”—Page 314.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class, go over your answer to Wednesday’s final question. What are some “good” things that we can make into idols? How do we know when something has become an idol?

2. Dwell more on the issues touched on in Thursday’s lesson. Look at the things that the people were doing, all the time coming to “the temple of the Lord” and worshiping there (see Jer. 7:4), things that were so contrary to the revealed word of God. How can we learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same trap? Why does simple obedience to God’s revealed Word play such an important role in protecting us from all sorts of deception?

3. Think about the worship services in your local church. Do you come away with a sense of the awe and majesty of God in contrast to your own sinfulness and need of grace? If not, what could be changed in order to help the church as a whole have, to some degree, the experience that Isaiah had? (See Monday’s lesson.) Why is that so important?

4. How many things do you do in your life that are “profitable for nothing”? How much time do you spend basically “wasting time,” doing things that, in and of themselves, are useless, vain, and basically “profitable for nothing”? How can you learn to make better use of the limited time we all have here in this life?
Lesson 10 *August 27–September 2

Worship: From Exile to Restoration

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Ezekiel 8, Daniel 3, Jer. 29:10–14, Haggai 1, Zech. 1:1–6, Nehemiah 1.

Memory Text: “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes” (Haggai 1:6).

It is very hard from our perspective—removed as we are by more than one thousand nine hundred years from the final destruction of the Jerusalem temple—to understand just how significant the temple was in the Jewish nation’s national and religious life. It was the apex of worship, the center of their ethnic and religious identity. It was where the Lord said He would dwell and rule in the midst of Israel. It was where the follower of YHWH found cleansing, forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation.

Because it was, truly, the Lord’s house, many people disbelieved the prophetic warnings that said it would be destroyed by Babylon. How could the Lord allow His sacred temple to be obliterated? We only can guess at the shock when, indeed, as the prophets had warned, the Babylonians razed it. And yet, even amid all the devastation, the Lord promised that the nation would be restored, the temple rebuilt, and Israel given another chance to fulfill her prophetic destiny.

This week we will look at some of the issues regarding worship during the time of the exile and, then, the promised restoration.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.
“Son of Man, Have You Seen . . . ?”

Apostasy does not happen overnight; whole peoples do not fall away in a day, a week, even in a year. The process is much slower; a little change here, a little compromise there; a little less rigidity in order to keep up with the times or to be relevant or to fit better with the trends of society and culture. Bit by bit, step by step, and before long, a whole nation is doing things that, perhaps a generation or two ago, would have been looked upon in horror. Such was the fate of ancient Israel and Judah; such was the fate of early Christianity. Such can be the fate of any church, including ours, which does not carefully and jealously guard the sacred truths and practices given to it by the Lord.

Read Ezekiel 8. As you read, realize that all this was taking place in the sacred temple that the Lord had instituted, the very place where the Lord had promised to place His name. How could the people, the spiritual leaders, have fallen into such apostasy? What lessons can we learn from this?

The secret sins, indulged by priests and elders, were the abominable and repulsive worship practices of their culture. Those who should have been leading God’s people in true worship were adapting that worship to the sinful and corrupt customs of their time and environment, thus bringing the abominations of the surrounding culture into God’s holy sanctuary. How ironic that only the coming of the Babylonian army would bring an end to the desecration of God’s temple, and then only by destroying it.

Carefully read Ezekiel 8:12. What kind of logic and rationale were these elders using to justify their actions? What might have led them to such false conclusions?

These people must have turned so far away from the Lord that they believed that He did not see them or that He did not care about their practices. The Lord, who again and again showed His care, His nearness, and His desire for obedience, now was deemed to have forsaken the land? How careful we need to be, because sin will harden our hearts and poison our minds until we rationalize even the most horrific practices.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Nehemiah 1:5–7

The Student Will:

Know: Explain how the tendency to conform to worldly expectations has been so devastating in the history of God’s people.
Feel: Long for uncompromising faithfulness and allegiance to God, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego displayed.
Do: Identify with the sinful condition of God’s people, lifting others into God’s presence through intercessory prayer.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Dangers of Conformity

A. What temptations to fit in with local cultural and social expectations did Daniel and his friends face? How is this still a temptation today?
B. How did leadership betray their responsibilities to keep Israel focused on true worship?
C. Which leaders risked their lives to intercede for Israel and lead their people into repentance and obedience?

II. Feel: Though He Slay Me

A. What attitude did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have when they were faced with Nebuchadnezzar’s demands to bow down to his image?
B. What should be our attitude as we respond to similar temptations?

III. Do: We Have Sinned

A. How did Daniel and Nehemiah, both godly men and exiles, identify themselves in their prayers with their faithless nation’s sins?
B. What similar prayers might we make today, for our families and for our church?

Summary: The exiles who returned to Jerusalem were faced with temptations to relax their vigilance in God’s service and conform to worldly customs. Similar temptations face us today. Confession, repentance, and obedience are still requisites for God’s presence among His people.
Worshiping the Image

As we have touched on all throughout this quarter, the final test in the last days deals with the question of worship (Rev. 14:1–12). All humanity will be split into two camps: those who worship the Creator, the One who made the heavens and the earth, and those who worship the beast and his image. Even though this sequence in the prophetic picture has yet to unfold, one could argue that, even now, all the world is divided into two camps: those who are faithful to the Lord and those who are not. There is no middle ground: we are on one side or the other.

With this in mind, the story of the three Hebrew boys in the book of Daniel becomes quite relevant. It is not just a dramatic story of a supernatural rescue of those faithful followers of YHWH. It becomes, instead, a symbol, a type, for the test of worship that will come upon the world just before the second coming of Christ.

Read Daniel 3. Compare the worship of the image here with the worship of the image in Revelation 14. What can we learn from this story that can help us to understand the issue regarding the mark of the beast?

The second commandment, the one forbidding idolatry (Exod. 20:4–6), was at issue here; the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8–11), the Sabbath commandment, will be the outward issue in the last days. How interesting that these both are commandments that were changed and tampered with by the beast power itself (see Dan. 7:25). Both commandments are tied in directly with worship; the second forbids the worship of idols, while the fourth shows why one should not worship idols, and that is because the Lord of nature, not nature itself, is the One who created and redeemed all of humanity (see also Deut. 5:12–15).

In both cases, too, there is an earthly political/religious entity that wants the worship and fealty owed only to the Lord, and in both cases this power is willing to resort to violence in order to get that “worship.”

Think through what it means to worship something. Is it always wrong to worship anything other than the Lord? If not, why not? Might there be some things that we can worship without sinning, without violating God’s law? If so, what? If not, how can we make sure we are not worshiping anything other than our Lord?
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God achieves the restoration and transformation of human souls, reconciling them to Himself through Christ.

**Just for Teachers:** Your students will no doubt recognize this story as one that held the media transfixed for many weeks at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010. The objective here is to examine the issue of restoration in light of one party’s repeated failings.

*Tiger Woods.* The name once synonymous with golf royalty has become a euphemism for marital infidelity. The transformation began with an early morning accident and quickly morphed into one of the fastest falls by a sports icon in modern sports history. Almost overnight, Woods went from being the “perfect” golfer and family man to a social pariah. Why? He had broken his marital vow with a number of other women.

Condemnation was swift and unrelenting. People theorized and philosophized about his emotional and mental health. He lost countless endorsements. Others wondered how he could cheat on such a beautiful woman, to say nothing of the impact on his children. How could a man who seemed to “have it all” make such poor decisions?

**Consider This:** Lost in the din of Woods’ personal failings, few people examined their own lives. Few Christians considered the impact of their own infidelities to a God who has never sinned against them or done them any harm. Why does God yearn to have us back when we have failed Him so mightily?

►STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** Deeper than the sinner’s sin is God’s love for that sinner. This week’s commentary section examines God’s efforts to bring His wayward loved ones—ancient and present—back into fellowship with Him.

I. The Other Temple (*Review Ezekiel 8 and 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 with your class.*)
“Consider Your Ways”

Read Jeremiah 29:10–14. What does this tell us about the character of God? What hope can we, in our own context, take from these verses?

After seventy years, as foretold, the Lord began the restoration of the exiles back to the Promised Land. Israel was to be given another chance to fulfill her prophetic destiny.

Central to that role was, of course, the temple, the sanctuary, the place where the entire plan of salvation was taught through the types and symbols of the service. Here the work and mission of the Messiah, through which the whole world could have salvation, was prefigured (see John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 8:1, 2).

Yet, the work of rebuilding the temple did not go as smoothly or as quickly as it should have. Forces, internal and external, got in the way, and the work was delayed. This was not as the Lord would have it, and He spoke through Haggai to let the people know of His displeasure.

Read Haggai 1. What happened here? What diverted their attention? Why is that so easy to do?

How easy it is to let worldly toils, worldly desires, even worldly needs get in the way of our spiritual responsibilities. The Lord let them know that they would never have true satisfaction apart from their devotion to Him and the work He had given them to do. All too often we can, in our own way, make the same mistake, getting so caught up in the ways of the world that we neglect what should be first and foremost in our lives: our relationship with God. Maybe the Lord is saying to us, either corporately or individually, “Consider your ways.”

Consider your ways. What do your ways, your actions, the things you do, and don’t do—what do they say about your relationship to the Lord? In what ways might you be guilty of the same things as the people depicted here in Haggai?
Learning Cycle

The catalog of abominations that God shows Ezekiel must have caused him deep distress. Not only were the Israelites worshiping foreign gods, but they brought those gods into the very presence of the one true God. (To get a sense of how far Judah and Israel had fallen, one need only read Deuteronomy 6:4–9, which enjoined the worship of one God.) Ezekiel 8:16 is particularly troubling. The prophet sees 25 men with their backs turned toward the temple so that they could worship the sun.

If the people of God had filled God’s earthly temple with foreign gods, what about their body temples? The apostle Paul makes it clear that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and that we are not our own. Peter reminds us that we “were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NKJV). If the leaders of the nation of Judah practiced such open rebellion against God, what were their inner lives like?

Consider This: Jesus stated, “There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man” (Mark 7:15, NKJV). How did the apostasy in Judah begin: with public displays of rebellion or private compromises of faith? Discuss. What cautionary lesson from Judah’s experience can we learn for our own spiritual lives?

II. Our Satan Problem (Review Haggai 1, Zechariah 1:1–6, and Zechariah 3 with your class.)

In case you didn’t know it, we humans have a Satan problem. The devil will never let us simply walk into God’s arms. As we’ve been discussing this quarter, Satan wants worship (Isa. 14:13), and so does God (Rev. 12:7). This is one reason that Satan worked feverishly to delay the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall and the Lord’s temple. This is also why he works tirelessly to prevent us from living God’s full destiny for our lives. To do so would mean that he would no longer be the object of our worship.

The prophet Zechariah was given a bird’s-eye view, in Zechariah 3, of the true nature of the adversary of our souls. In the presence of God, Satan stood ready to accuse and oppose Joshua, the high priest. But God interceded: “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?’ ” (vs. 2, NKJV). God then directed His angel to remove Joshua’s filthy garments, symbolic of his iniquity, and clothe him in rich robes (vs. 4).
Your Fathers, Where Are They?

The rebuilding of the temple took approximately twelve years. Ezra 5:1, 2 refers to Zechariah as one of the “prophets of God helping them.” His emphasis, like Haggai’s, was upon the glory that would one day inhabit the temple.

Yet, as often is with prophecy, the promises are not unconditional. Humans, given free will, must make the choice to obey the Lord, to do what He commands, not as a means of salvation but as a means of showing the fruit and the benefits of salvation.

Human freedom is an unspoken assumption all through the Scriptures. People have the option to choose whom they will serve and worship, and the fulfillment of the promises is incumbent upon the choices that people make. The Bible is filled with wonderful promises to any and all who faithfully seek and serve Him.

Read Zechariah 1:1–6. What theme is found here that is repeated, again and again, throughout almost all of the Bible? How is the reality of human free will and free choice revealed in these verses?

Some of the most poignant words in that text are found in verse 5. “Your fathers, where are they?” In other words, learn from the mistakes of those who came before you; do not do what they did; learn from the past, learn from what happened before you.

Here is where the ministry of the pastor in the pulpit can come in. Here is where the pastor can, in the role of the prophets, point the people to the Lord’s leading, to His promises, and to the conditions of those promises. The preaching of the Word should not cause theological confusion or controversy: it should be Christ centered, pointing to what the Lord has done for us, what He offers to do for us, and what He will do for us, all on the condition that we come to Him in faith and repentance. That is essentially what Zechariah is saying to the people here: repent, turn from your evil ways, learn from the past, and put your hope in the Lord and the promises of the Lord for the future.

In the same way, today, with the revelation of what the sanctuary service was all about (the life and death and high priestly ministry of Jesus), we should come to the Lord and worship Him in an attitude of faith, repentance, and obedience. Again, though obedience cannot save us (it is way too late for that), there is no such thing as salvation without it, regardless of how flawed our obedience tends to be.
Joshua represented the torn, tattered, chastened people after exile. They weren’t much to look at, but God loved them and wanted to restore them. Not coincidentally, Zechariah’s vision points forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, which removed our iniquity and clothed us with His righteousness (Rom. 4:22–25, 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 5:12). This scene reveals the essence of the gospel.

**Consider This:** The returning exiles were having problems keeping their focus on God and His commands. Haggai makes it clear that they struggled mightily in search of worldly goods that could never take the place of God. What does it mean to be in the world but not of it? How do we live successfully that way (John 17:16, 17)?

**III. We’ve Got a Ministry** *(Review Nehemiah 1 and 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 with your class.)*

Nehemiah’s love for the returning exiles is inspirational. As the lesson notes, he not only feels their pain *(Neh. 1:4)*, but he positions himself squarely with their plight. Nehemiah then appeals to God to open a way by which he can go and help them.

Ever since Cain asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” *(Gen. 4:9)*, the question of our responsibility to our brothers and sisters has echoed throughout time. The answer from God is a resounding, “Yes!” The apostle Paul highlights this reality in 2 Corinthians, as he justifies his apostleship. The God who reconciled us through Christ calls us to help Him reconcile others *(2 Cor. 5:18).* “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” *(vs. 20, NKJV)*.

**Consider This:** Notice here that God is taking the initiative to reconcile humanity back to Himself. Isaiah 59:1, 2 makes it clear that sin has caused a separation, a break, in the natural relationship that should have existed between God and humanity. How does this break affect our worship?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following questions to generate deeper thinking and discussion about God’s effort to reconcile fallen human beings. It is a telling fact that many will choose to be lost rather than accept God’s offer of forgiveness and restoration.
Nehemiah’s Prayer

Despite all the promises of restoration, things were not going well in Jerusalem. The people faced obstacle after obstacle, many of them as a result of their own disobedience. The prophet Nehemiah, while serving the Persian king, received word about the situation there and responded with fasting, mourning, and prayer. His passion and concern for the situation clearly are revealed in the first chapter of the book that bears his name.

Read Nehemiah 1, his prayer in response to what he heard, and then answer the following questions:

1. Why would Nehemiah, who as far as we know was faithful, include himself among those who had sinned against the Lord? See Dan. 9:5, 6.

2. What kind of prayer is this, and why is this kind of prayer so important? See Exod. 32:31–34, James 5:16.

3. In what ways is the conditionality of prophecy revealed in this prayer?

4. On what basis does he make his appeal to the Lord on behalf of the people? In other words, why should the Lord listen to this appeal? See Gen. 12:1–3; Exod. 6:4, 5.

Write a prayer of intercession for the Seventh-day Adventist Church today and bring it to class on Sabbath and compare what you write with the other class members. What do our answers tell us about the way in which we perceive the various spiritual needs of the church? More important, how can we help to bring about whatever reforms we deem necessary?
**Learning Cycle CONTINUED**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Romans 12:2 states, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV). Given the hereditary and cultivated tendencies to sin with which many of us struggle, how does God go about transforming us?

2. This week’s study mentioned the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrew worthies from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. When was the last time that you saw God move to save you from some terrible eventuality?

**Application Questions:**

1. Sometimes freedom can pose severe challenges, as was seen in the life of post-exilic Israel. Explain what you think the apostle Paul meant by this statement: “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13, NKJV).

2. What impact does the contemplation of Jesus Christ have on our mental well-being, our ability to comprehend, appreciate, and obey the dictates of God (2 Cor. 3:18)?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson explores the messages of God’s prophets to the returning Israelite remnant. The activity below is designed to make these messages more real to your class members.

If you were to write a letter addressing a group of people who have backslidden or forgotten their divine calling, what would you say to them? What types of arguments or experiences would you draw on to make your case? Share your response or draft an actual letter, individually or as a class, remembering to be as loving and encouraging as possible.

“The season of distress before God’s people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 512; emphasis supplied.

“There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with [worldly people], they must to a certain extent conform to the world. But though such a course may appear to afford great advantages, it always ends in spiritual loss.”—Page 570; emphasis supplied.

“In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, . . . neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. . . . They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed.”—Page 675.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Read the prayers of intercession for the Seventh-day Adventist Church that were written in response to Thursday’s lesson. What can we learn from each of these prayers? What do people perceive as the greatest need of the church at the present time?

2. What lessons can we learn from our own church fathers and mothers? That is, what important spiritual lessons can our own Seventh-day Adventist history teach us?

3. What are ways in which we, as a church, in our efforts to reach out to the surrounding culture, are in danger of compromising crucial truths? Why are we so often blind to compromise when it happens?

4. While there is always the danger of compromising ourselves in an attempt to be relevant, there is also the danger of locking ourselves into beliefs or practices that, perhaps, need refining or changing. How can we know what is immutable and unchangeable, in contrast to that which can and should change with the times?
Lesson 11

*September 3–9

In Spirit and in Truth

Sabbath Afternoon


Memory Text: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).

As we have seen all quarter, the first angel’s message is a call to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.” At the center of that gospel is Jesus, the incarnate God, the God who, through forces and means that our minds cannot even begin to grasp, came into this world as a human being.

Think through what this means: the God who created all that was created (John 1:1–3) became a human, and in that humanity lived a sinless life and then offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. Think about the size of the cosmos, the billions of galaxies, each composed of billions of stars. Imagine! The One who created all this was Jesus—it defies the human mind; it is something so incredible we barely can comprehend it. No wonder Paul wrote: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

With a truth like this before us, it is no wonder we want to worship such a God. This week we will explore themes of worship and praise as revealed in the ministry of the incarnate Christ, the Creator who took upon Himself the form and the flesh of the created.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.

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Mary’s Song of Praise and Worship

Though Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been the subject of an intense amount of religious interest throughout the centuries, most of that interest is tradition derived from a host of sources that are not rooted in Scripture.

Nevertheless, in the question of Christ’s coming to earth, Mary played a crucial and pivotal role: in her womb the Savior of the world was miraculously conceived; in her womb He grew into the infant Jesus. Looking back with all the hindsight and light given to us in the New Testament, we only can marvel at the miracle. Though no doubt knowing that she was part of an incredible event that was to have important consequences for her people, the young Mary probably had no real idea of that which she was going to be a part. She knew enough, though, that she could marvel at the amazing circumstances that had so radically changed her life.

Read Luke 1:46–55, often known as the Song of Mary. What is the background to this song? Why is she singing it? What elements of praise and worship are revealed here? What appears here that we have touched on all throughout the quarter?

This song of praise and worship is filled with allusions and images taken from the Old Testament, the only Scripture that Mary would have known. Here we can see her giving glory to the Lord and acknowledging His leading not only in her own life but among her own people, as well. Her allusion to Abraham is, clearly, a reference to the covenant the Lord made with His people; she is praising God for His promises to them and sees those promises as her hope and her people’s hope for the future.

Again, however much she did not know, she knew enough to see the working of the Lord. For that, she was thankful and worshipful.

How much of the miraculous do you see in your own life? Might it be there and yet you are just too hard, too closed, too wrapped up in yourself to see it as you should?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *John 4:23*

The Student Will:

**Know:** Explain how Christ’s ministry and example highlight the themes of true worship in contrast with the false worship practices of the day.

**Feel:** Sense the essence of what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

**Do:** Go beyond outward ritual and form and drink deeply from the living water that Jesus promises to provide as we worship and grow in our relationship with God.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Christ and Worship

A. How did Mary’s prayer acknowledge the momentous occasion of the fulfillment of God’s promises to His people?

B. How did Christ make the boundaries of worship clear during His wilderness temptations?

II. Feel: In Spirit and Truth

A. How did the Samaritan woman at the well try to use differences in worship preferences in an attempt to sideline Christ’s revelation to her? How might we do the same today?

B. What did Christ identify as the unqualified formula for true worship?

C. What does it take to worship in a way that pleases God?

D. How do we keep a balance of spirit and truth in our worship?

III. Do: Living Water

A. What do we need to do in order to drink deeply of the living water that Jesus provides?

B. What part does living water play in true worship?

Summary: By His example, Christ reinforced the need for God’s supremacy in our regard and service and the importance of worshiping in spirit and truth.
Worship and Serve

“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:5–8).

Imagine Jesus, after 40 full days of hunger, weariness, self-denial, and privation, now facing the open and blatant temptations of the devil. It is not hard to imagine just how beautiful all “the kingdoms of the world” in their “power” and their “glory” must have appeared to Jesus in this temptation. Satan has been a master at making the things of this world always look so charming, so pleasant, so fulfilling, which is why people so readily fall for the deception this world presents.

Read the above verses carefully, especially Jesus’ response. What does Jesus mean by linking together the verbs “worship” and “serve”? How are they related?

All throughout the Old Testament, the concept of worshiping false gods is linked with serving them. “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldst be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (Deut. 4:19; see also Deut. 11:16, Ps. 97:7, Dan. 3:12). Basically, you serve what you worship; hence, how important it is that you worship only the Lord.

Thus, we see a crucial point about worship. It is hard to imagine someone who worships the Lord in faith, in surrender, in humility and love and fear, while at the same time serving other gods, in whatever form they may come. Worship, then, can be a protection for us against idolatry. The more we worship the Lord, even in our private devotion, the better protected we are against serving self, sin, and all the other forces vying for our service.

Think about this idea more: what we worship is what we serve. How have you seen that principle manifested in your own life? How can your worship experience help you to stay focused on serving only the Lord?
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** When we spend time with the stories of Jesus, we discover the true subject of our worship, and also discover what He taught about worship.

**Just for Teachers:** Collect examples that are available to you of how Jesus has been trivialized in different ways. If possible, bring some of these to the class discussion, or print out copies of these kinds of things from Internet sites. Examples could include Jesus “action figures” or other figurines, Jesus T-shirts, music, or instances of people using Jesus to justify some kind of action or choice that seems obviously to contradict what Jesus taught. Try to discourage class members from being judgmental of things in which other believers find meaning. Instead, focus on examples that seem blatantly commercial or otherwise trivial. Lead the discussion as suggested below, seeking to lead class members to be discerning in their recognition of the positives and negatives that exist in the ways in which Jesus is portrayed in various cultures.

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to suggest examples of how Jesus is trivialized in different cultures of the world—even in church culture. Share the examples you have collected and, as a group, reflect on the possible motivations for the various items being considered. Talk about why Jesus seems to be so common in many cultures of the world, even some of those not obviously “Christian.” Discuss why Jesus seems to have become a kitsch character or marketing opportunity and how this interest in Jesus is different from authentic worship. What are the positive aspects that might come from someone wearing a Jesus T-shirt, for example? But how is worship something different and more than this? Conclude this discussion by introducing the stories of how people who actually met Jesus responded to Him.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides an opportunity to consider aspects of worship through stories of Jesus’ life and teachings.
Worshiping What You Know Not

As we have seen numerous times, even with all the intricate and deep forms of worship that the Lord had instituted for Israel, it was not the forms alone that the Lord cared about. The forms and traditions and liturgy were all means to an end, and that end was a person surrendered in body and mind to his or her Creator and Redeemer. It is much easier, however, to make one’s religion a series of formulas, traditions, and outward acts than it is to daily die to self and surrender in humility and faith to the Lord. This fact surely goes a long way in explaining why the Bible spends a lot of time dealing with those whose hearts aren’t right with God, regardless of how “correct” their forms of worship are.

This, too, was a problem with which Jesus dealt when here in the flesh.

Read John 4:1–24. What important point about worship was Jesus making to the Samaritan woman in verse 21? Why was He pointing her away from specific places of worship?

By pointing out some of her deepest secrets, Jesus got the woman’s attention. He then used that moment to point her to something better than what she had. Jesus uses the powerful phrase, “Woman, believe me” in order to show her that true worship went far beyond the outward forms and places of worship. “This mountain” was Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had built a temple. Of course, that would be what one would expect a Jew to say to a Samaritan.

But Jesus did not stop there. He included even Jerusalem, the site of the sacred temple that He, Himself, had picked. Thus, early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus was, in a very broad way, pointing to what He later came right out and said in reference to the temple, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). In all this, Jesus was working to give the woman the “living water” (John 4:10), which is Himself. He wanted her to see that a personal relationship with her Creator and Redeemer was the foundation of worship and that the forms and traditions of her faith, which had deviated from the true religion of the Jews, were certainly not. His reference to Jerusalem (John 4:21), however, proved that He was pointing to something even beyond the system of sacrifice and worship that He Himself had created.

In what ways can all the aspects of your worship experience help you deepen your relationship with God?
I. A Song About Jesus (Review Luke 1:46–55 with your class.)

Even before Jesus was born, the good news of His coming prompted Mary to praise God for His goodness, His acts in history, His intervention in her life, and the hope of salvation in Jesus. Mary was visited by an angel with a personal message and task for her—recorded in Luke 1:26–38—but she was quick to recognize that this news was part of the bigger plan and actions of God throughout history. Her expression of worship demonstrated the depth of her understanding that something big was afoot and that she was privileged to play a part in it.

Consider This: What stands out to you from Mary’s song? Do you think this song was spontaneous, inspired, or perhaps carefully composed? Why? And what difference might it make in how we read it?

II. Tempted to “Worship” (Review Luke 4:5–8 with your class.)

The second temptation of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 4 (third temptation in Matthew’s account), was perhaps the greatest offer to Jesus. The core of His mission on earth was to reclaim the kingdoms of this world as God’s domain. This temptation seemed a shortcut to that goal. But Jesus stood firm, asserting that God, and only God, is worthy of worship. He also set the example of maintaining true worship no matter what the cost or how alluring the offer, looking forward to the promise held out in John’s vision in Revelation: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: ‘The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever’” (Rev. 11:15, NLT).

Consider This: Why might Jesus have found this temptation attractive?

How does it change our perspective on worship to remember the promises we have for the future—such as this one in Revelation—whatever our current circumstance?

III. Jesus Talks About Worship. (Review John 4:1–24 with your class.)

When Jesus answered questions that were the topic of theological discussions of His day, He often sidestepped the questions, choosing instead to reframe the conversation and give His listeners a new way of considering the topic. One of these instances is found in John
The True Worshipers

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).

After pointing the Samaritan away from specific places of worship and then telling her of the superiority of the Jewish faith over hers, Jesus tells the woman about “the true worshipers.” In verse 21, Jesus said that the hour “is coming” when people will not worship either in that mountain or in Jerusalem; in verse 23, however, He says that the hour “now is” that all true worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, do not look to some past glory, and do not look to some future event. Rather, the time “now is” to give the Lord the worship He deserves, and through that worship, experience the love, the grace, and the salvation that He offers.

Jesus said that all true worshipers will “worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” What do these two elements represent, and how are we to apply this to our worship experience today? See also Mark 7:6–9.

Jesus here is calling for a balanced form of worship: a worship that comes from the heart, that is sincere and deeply felt, that comes from the love and the fear of God. There is nothing wrong with emotions in worship; after all, our religion calls upon us to love God (1 John 5:2, Mark 12:30), and how can love be separated from emotions?

At the same time, God calls upon His true worshipers to worship Him “in truth.” God has revealed His will, His truth, His law—truth that we are expected to believe and obey. True worshipers will love God and from that love seek to serve Him, obey Him, and do what is right. Yet, how can they know what is right without knowing the truth about faith, obedience, salvation, and so forth? The idea that beliefs do not matter, that only a sincere spirit matters, is misguided. It is only half of the equation. Correct beliefs do not save, but they will give us a greater understanding of the character of God, and that should make us love and serve Him all the more.

Is your worship more spirit than truth, or more truth than spirit? How can you learn to incorporate and balance both these aspects of worship?
Learning Cycle Continued

4:19–24, in which the Samaritan woman raised a common discussion about where God can be truly worshiped. Jesus explained that how we worship—the attitude with which we come to worship—is much more important than where. He reminded the woman that God is accessible to everyone who genuinely seeks Him. But Jesus also demonstrated that asking the right questions is more important than answering the lesser questions that can easily distract us.

Consider This: What do you understand that Jesus meant when He talked about worshiping “in spirit and in truth”?

- What are some of the questions by which we might get distracted?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Jesus is the center of our worship, so understanding what He said about it and how He lived it is vital to creating a healthy life of worship, individually and as a church. It is interesting that Jesus did not seem to say much about worship directly, and we have only occasional reports of His involvement in what we would recognize as worship. Yet, He lived a life of worship and service to God, His Father, and constantly pointed others to Him, which is what worship must be about.

Application Questions:

1. Compared to other parts of the Bible and to its role in our church life, worship might be considered to play a relatively small role in the life of Jesus. Do you agree or disagree?

2. How does worship in the life and teaching of Jesus compare with worship in the life of the church today?

3. Do you think worship is more effective or engaging when it is spontaneous or when it is carefully planned? Why? What are the advantages of spontaneous worship? What are the advantages of a more planned form of worship?

4. How are we sometimes tempted to worship in ways that lead us away from God? How do we guard against this?
Worshiping at His Feet

Throughout the long years of Christian history, the church has been divided over the issue of Christ’s divinity. Was He truly the eternal God, One with the Father since eternity? Or was He created later, a being who came into existence through the creative power of the Father?

Though early on in our own church some confusion on this matter existed, Ellen G. White made it very clear years ago what her position was—a position that, as a church, we have fully accepted today:

“‘His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’”—The Desire of Ages, p. 19.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the deity of Christ?


Jesus was very clear in His response to Satan (Matt. 4:10) that the Lord alone should be worshiped, which leads to the important point shown in the texts above: Christ never refused their worship. There is no example of Jesus telling the numerous people who worshiped Him, Don’t worship Me, point your worship only toward the Father. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Read Luke 19:37–40. What does Jesus’ response to the Pharisees say about His attitude toward those who worshiped Him?

The point here is to reiterate a theme seen all this quarter, which is how crucial it is that Jesus be the center and focus of all our worship. Every song, every prayer, every sermon, everything that we do should, in one way or another, ultimately direct our minds toward Christ, the incarnate God who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Worship that leaves us with a sense of awe, love, and reverence for our Lord is worship that is no doubt pleasing in His sight.
Do you think Jesus was saying to the woman at the well that places of worship are unimportant? Why, or why not? How might places dedicated to worship be helpful or unhelpful to worship?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** These activities are intended to prompt class members to worship in ways they might not usually do—to praise God in written form and to look for echoes of Jesus and prompts to praise in their local area.

**Individual Activities:** Provide paper and pens or pencils and ask class members to compose their songs of praise to God and His actions in their lives and the world in the style of Mary’s song in Luke 1. This could be written as poetry, prose, or even just notes, using the introductory words from Mary’s song as a starting point and prompt:

“Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior! For He . . .”

If members of the class are willing to share their “songs,” take some time to read these as a closing prayer for the class.

**Group or Team Activities:** As a class, plan a walk in a local neighborhood or nearby natural area. This could take place during class time or at another time, perhaps a Sabbath afternoon. Plan to have a prayerful attitude and to walk gently, with an awareness of the presence of God and alertness to echoes of God in the world around us. Look for prompts to prayer or praise as the group walks, pausing to point out or acknowledge them. Remember, Jesus often used images and stories from the natural world to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like. After an agreed time, finish the worship time with group prayer and perhaps share a meal together or visit with class members in the place you have explored.

“Not by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple are men brought into communion with heaven. Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 189; emphasis supplied.

“One equal with God, acted as servant to His disciples. . . . He to whom every knee shall bow, He whom the angels of glory count it honor to serve, bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord.”—Page 649.

Discussion Questions:

1. The religious leaders of Christ’s day claimed to know the Scriptures but were oblivious to the greatest miracle in history, the birth of the Messiah. Meanwhile, the wise men of the East came looking for Him in the right place at the right time. What significance does this story hold for us today as Christians, and as a church? How can we avoid the mistakes of the people in Christ’s day, as we see the prophecies of the last days being fulfilled?

2. Talk about the deity of Christ—why it is so important to our faith and worship. What do we lose if we, in any way, make Christ anything other than fully God?

3. Think again about Mary and what must have been going through her mind at this incredible turn of events. Think how much she didn’t understand and how hard some of this might have been for her (being pregnant without ever knowing a man certainly must have been stressful). And yet, even amid all this, she was able to praise the Lord and worship Him, despite so many unanswered questions, so many troublesome thoughts, so many unknowns. How can we learn to do the same: to worship and praise the Lord amid times of uncertainty and unknowns? In fact, why might that, of all times, be the best time to be wholeheartedly in an attitude of worship?
Soon after Christ returned to heaven, the early church began to expand and grow. At first, it almost was exclusively Jews who were accepting Jesus as the Messiah and coming into the ranks of believers. Indeed, at first, many of the believers thought that the gospel was only for the Jews, which showed how much they still had to learn.

At Pentecost, after Peter’s preaching and altar call before a multitude of Jews (Acts 2), “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). This text alone shows the fallacy of the idea that all the Jews rejected Jesus.

Yet, we would be mistaken to look back on the early church as some sort of idyllic time of worship and praise. Though in a radically different context, the early church struggled with some of the same issues with which we struggle today, issues that could and would impact everything about their faith, including worship.

This week we will take a look at a few instances from the early days of Christianity and some of the challenges the church faced as it grew, and we’ll seek to learn from the good things and, also, from the bad.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.*
Many “Proofs”

From a human perspective, Jesus’ earthly ministry did not look so successful. Though He had attracted a fairly popular following while alive, it did not catch on en masse. Many leaders rejected Him, and, of course, the Romans crucified Him, causing His closest disciples to scatter and flee.

Things looked pretty bad until His resurrection and then Pentecost, when suddenly His followers found a new boldness to proclaim their crucified Master as the Messiah of Israel. It was only after the resurrection of Jesus, in fact, that the early church started to take off.

Read Acts 1:1–11. What important truths do we find here about the Second Coming, baptism, the Holy Spirit, and mission?

_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________

Look especially at verses 3 and 6. What do they tell us about how much more truth the disciples had to learn?

_______________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________

One of the most interesting parts of this section is verse 3, in which Luke states that Jesus presented them with many “proofs.” Some versions use the phrase “infallible proofs,” which is somewhat overstating the case. Another translation calls them “convincing proofs,” which is the less problematic translation. The point here is that the believers in Jesus were given powerful evidence, “proof” of Jesus as the Messiah. Considering the daunting task to which He had called them and all the opposition that they would face, they needed all the proof they could get. The good news is that the Lord will give us all the reasons we need for faith, all the reasons we need to believe in things that we do not fully understand. As we see in these texts, the disciples still did not fully understand the Lord’s intentions regarding the nation of Israel, even after all this time with Jesus. We need to learn to worship, praise, and obey the Lord, despite all that we do not understand.

Think about the powerful evidence we have for our beliefs and all the good reasons for the logic of our faith. Notice, too, the use of the word faith. What does faith imply? That is, what good reasons do you have for having faith, a belief in something that you do not fully understand?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1

The Student Will:
Know: Recognize the importance of preaching the Word of God in worship and its effect on the growth of the early church.
Feel: Cultivate a loving attitude toward others as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13.
Do: Rest his or her faith and worship on God, our Creator and Redeemer, as a safeguard against falsehood.

Learning Outline:
I. Know: Preach the Word
   A Why is preaching and heeding the Word of God such a critical part of worship?
   B What role does hearing the Word have in developing faith in believers, as well as unbelievers?

II. Feel: Love
   A Why is love the most important of all gifts to the church?
   B How can the misuse of some gifts create conflict?
   C How can love be a safeguard against such abuses?

III. Do: Facing Challenges
   A Both the early church and our church today face problems. How can faith in the centrality of our belief in Christ as Creator and Redeemer keep our feet from stumbling over problems in the church?
   B How would you counsel someone who is struggling with belief in evolution versus Creation? How does our belief in our Creator qualify and inform our belief in our Redeemer?

Summary: God’s Word regarding His law, our history with Him as a people through time, His redeeming acts, and the future He is preparing for us are the foundations of our worship and safeguards for our faith.
The Preaching of the Word

A great part of the Protestant worship tradition has been the preaching of the Word. A sacred responsibility falls upon the one given the task to feed the sheep, to teach and to preach and to exhort and to encourage. Music, liturgy, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, and foot washing all have their place, but, perhaps, nothing’s more important than what is preached from the pulpit during the worship hour.

Read Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41). How are the important topics of Scripture, doctrine, prophecy, Christ, gospel, and salvation expressed by Peter, and why are these so essential in preaching?

What an experience it must have been, hearing the fisherman Peter preach with such power and authority. His words did not show any kind of waffling, any kind of doubt, but rather revealed the Spirit working through Him. All throughout his homily, Peter never wavers, but using the Scriptures (then, only the Old Testament) he preaches with power the gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Messiah, who is now “‘exalted to the right hand of God’” (Acts 2:33). It is amazing how, in such a small number of sentences, he covers such an incredible amount of information, everything from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to repentance to the Second Coming.

What were the results of the preaching at this worship service? See Acts 2:41. What can we take away from this for ourselves and our Sabbath services?

Certainly, this must have been a very special worship service. Yet, at the same time, we have the same promises that they had. We have the same Bible (and now the New Testament, as well) that they had, and we have the same Lord who offers us the same Spirit. Why, then, shouldn’t we have worship services with the kind of power we see here? What is holding us back?
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** As demonstrated in the early church, worship is vital to the communal life of the church, and preaching is an important component of that, as well as an effective method of evangelism.

**Just for Teachers:** Preaching is an important component of worship in the church, and many Christians can recall moments in their spiritual lives that centered on meaningful sermons and worship experiences. Some preachers have important ministries through their ongoing teaching and their encouragement of people who listen to them regularly. It is important to recognize and support these Christian leaders. On the other hand, we need to be careful of preachers who become “celebrities,” a situation that can create risks for both the preachers themselves and their “fans.” In discussing favorite preachers, the emphasis should be on qualities of faithful preaching, rather than on the personalities of “celebrity” preachers. One suggestion to include in this discussion would be to consider Jesus as a preacher in light of His sermons, as recorded in the Gospels. This discussion should also be tempered by Paul’s reflections in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to nominate their favorite preachers—people whose sermons teach, inspire, encourage, or challenge. When a class member suggests a name, ask what he or she appreciates about this preacher’s sermons. Make a list of these qualities on a flipchart or blackboard. Allow time for a class discussion and for a variety of suggestions to be made and the list of qualities to grow. In concluding the activity, reflect on the list that has been compiled from class suggestions, and discuss the importance of preaching in the worship and witness of the church.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Exploring the roles of worship and preaching in the early church allows us to consider what significance they might have for the church today. When comparing the three sermons in part II, the class could be divided into three smaller groups to each consider one of the sermons and to report back to the larger group.
Paul on Mars Hill

In the days of the early church, we can see another example of the issue of worship, and of what people worship—this time in the ministry of the apostle Paul when he was in Athens, the place where three of the world’s most influential philosophers (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) once lived.

What a different audience Paul had to deal with here than did Peter years earlier before all those devout Jews in Jerusalem!

Read Acts 17:15–34, the account of Paul’s preaching in Athens. How different was Paul’s witness to these people from that of Peter’s to the audience on the Day of Pentecost?

One of the most obvious differences is that, unlike Peter, Paul does not quote the Bible here. In fact, he quotes a pagan author instead. At the same time, notice how Paul appeals to logic and reason: look around at the created world, he is saying, and you will see powerful evidence of the Creator God. He is starting out, using a kind of natural theology and pointing to the natural world as a reason to believe in the Creator God.

It is interesting to note the issue of worship here. These people were worshiping something that they did not understand. Paul sought to take that devotion and worship and turn it away from idols and other vain things and toward the living God. Humans seem to have an innate need to worship something, anything, and here Paul seeks to point them to the only thing truly worthy of their worship.

On what point did some of these people have a real problem, and why?

In the end, appeals to logic and reason and natural theology can take us only so far. Paul, in his witness, then sought to teach them about repentance, judgment, and the resurrection, teachings that need to be taken on faith. Hence, he did not have that much success with them. Though he had a few converts, most seemed to have gone back to their worship of what is vain, useless, and unable to save.

In what ways can our worship services better reach out to those who do not have a biblical background, who do not start with the same premises as we do? How can we make our worship services more seeker-friendly?
Bible Commentary

I. Questions and Doubts (Review Acts 1:1–11 with your class.)

After Jesus’ resurrection, the believers who would become the early church had just a short period of time to adjust to the new reality of their resurrected Messiah. In Acts 1 we see evidence of their many questions. Matthew 28:17 sums it up this way: “When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!” (NLT).

Drawing on the Jewish tradition of exploring God by intense study of the Scriptures, author Rob Bell points out that “the rabbis even say a specific blessing when they don’t understand a portion of the text. When it eludes them, when it makes no sense, they say a word of thanks to God because of the blessing that will be theirs someday. ‘Thank you, God, that at some point in the future, the lights are going to come on for me.’”—Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith (Zondervan, 2005), pp. 68, 69. Approached in this way, what we don’t know or understand can actually be a trigger for worship.

Consider This: What place do questions and doubts have in worship? Are you able to praise God for what you don’t know about Him?

II. Comparing Three Sermons (Review Acts 2:14–41, 17:15–34, and 18:1–16 with your class.)

The book of Acts is a casebook of early experiments in Christian life and witness. While these experiments were Spirit-led, the men and women involved in these differing circumstances were working to find out how best to live and express their newfound faith as inspired by Jesus. One aspect of this was preaching, and the verses cited above give examples of three sermons given in quite different circumstances as the message of Jesus spread across the Roman world. These sermons are among the most famous in Christian history, and they provide examples of how these preachers adapted the message of Jesus for the hearers to whom, and the context in which, they were speaking. Consider the following questions as a guide to comparing these three great sermons:

• Who was the preacher?
Worship “Contrary to the Law”

Worship is not just about what you do in church on Sabbath. Worship encompasses aspects of our whole faith: what we believe, what we proclaim, how we act. Central to worship is the idea of the Lord as our Creator and our Redeemer. Everything about worship should flow from this fundamental and sacred truth. Again, worship is primarily about God and the actions of God in history. Authentic worship should draw participants into a closer walk with their Lord. It should lead us to a sense of awe, reverence, repentance, and love for Him and for others.

Though we always should be thinking about the Lord (Luke 21:36, Ps. 1:2), worship time should be something special, something unique. We cannot, however, rely on the church itself or on the worship leaders themselves to provide that kind of experience for us, however much of a role they may play. In the end, it comes down to ourselves and the attitude we bring to church with us on Sabbath.

At the same time, as we have seen all quarter, worship is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Our worship does not save us; rather, our worship is one of our responses to being saved.

Read Acts 18:1–16. What charge was laid against Paul, and what does that tell us about worship?

It is fascinating that Paul was charged with persuading people toward a different kind of worship, a worship “contrary to the law” (vs. 13). (Even the Jews who believed in Jesus at times leveled a similar accusation against Paul.) The point in Acts 18 is that these people were so caught up in tradition, so caught up in how things were done in the past, so caught up in the forms of worship, that when Paul presented them with the One who was the whole purpose of their worship, the One whom they worshiped without knowing it, the One whom all the worship services really pointed to—they rejected what he said. They were so caught up were they in the law itself that they missed the One to whom the law pointed.

Again, though our circumstances today are radically different from Paul’s, we need to be careful not to allow our forms and traditions to get in the way of what our faith really should be about. Any worship that does not lead us directly to the Cross is misguided.
Learning Cycle CONTINUED

• To whom was this sermon delivered?
• What was the larger social context in which this sermon was preached?
• How does the preacher specifically connect with his hearers?
• What does this sermon have in common with the other two sermons we are considering?
• What is unique about this sermon among the three?
• What effect is recorded from this sermon?
• In what context might a sermon like this be appropriate or effective in society today?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Today some people say that sermons are no longer relevant in societies that are increasingly used to the fast-paced entertainment of television, movies, and the Internet. At the same time, many people will still attest to how a sermon has transformed their lives. Just like the early church in Acts, we need to find the best ways to communicate the good news about Jesus in the contexts in which we live and worship. This is something we need to be able to talk about prayerfully and carefully in our churches.

Application Questions:

1. To what extent are the stories in Acts a model for the church today, as opposed to being simply stories of the beginnings of the church?
2. Is it wrong to have questions and doubts? Why, or why not?
3. How important is preaching as a part of worship in the life of the church? Must every worship service include a sermon? What alternatives could be used to teach and challenge worshipers?
4. How important is context to worship and evangelism? Are there risks associated with trying too hard to be contextual? How do we keep this in balance?
5. What is needed to be a good listener to a sermon?
6. Love is a word with many meanings. How would you explain the concept

CONTINUED
Love Conquers All

It is so easy, from our perspective today, to look back at the early church as some sort of model of harmony and peace, an example of what true worship was all about. Unfortunately, New Testament history is so similar to Old Testament history in that both show just how far fallen we all are.

Take, for example, the church in Corinth, which Paul established on his second missionary journey. A commercial hub, known for its luxury and wealth, Corinth was also a center of one of the most sensual and degrading religions of that era. Influenced by their culture, immorality and dissension had invaded the church. And yet, as bad as it was, it was not the only problem there. Paul addressed other issues that were causing factions to develop in the church, including idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14) and the seeming overemphasis of the gifts, especially the misuse of the gift of tongues for self-seeking motives (1 Corinthians 14).

In the midst of his discourse to the Corinthians and all their problems, Paul gives them the famous chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. What is the essential message here? More important, how can we apply this to our lives and worship today?

Paul suggested that no profession we make, no mighty miracles, no charismatic gifts, and no piety or zeal will profit us unless there is a heart filled with love for God, confirmed by love for one another. That, says Paul, is the ultimate gift for which we should seek, which may not be substituted with anything less.

Spiritual gifts are helpful, and Christians should use their gifts to honor God and to build up the church in unity. But never should any spiritual gift be used for display of self, personal gain, or in a disorderly way, in worship or otherwise.

In the end, a church filled with loving, dedicated Christians will exert an influence and power that extend far beyond the weekly worship service.

How much does unselfish love for others impact your daily life? That is, how much of your own time and energy do you spend on seeking to minister to others? How much of self are you willing to renounce, all for the good of other people? It is not so easy, is it?
Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 13 to someone unfamiliar with this chapter and biblical language?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Both of these activities are designed to prompt class members to consider the possibilities of preaching as a component of worship. Perhaps not everyone in the class will be preaching in the near future, but as part of communal worship in the church it is something we should all think about and contribute to.

**Individual Activities:** Begin to plan a sermon that could share some of the principles of worship that have struck you in the course of Bible study and class discussions over the past weeks. What are the ideas or insights that have caught your attention or imagination and that you would be enthusiastic about sharing with others? What could be an effective way to share these with others? You might not have an opportunity to preach this sermon immediately, but if you have an interest in this path, continue to develop your ideas and be open to God’s invitation for you to share when opportunities arise.

**Group or Team Activities:** As a group, develop a list of guidelines for faithful and worthwhile preaching. Use principles from the Bible study this week and perhaps some of the qualities of a good sermon or preacher from the opening activity. If your church pastor or someone else in your church who has been trained in preaching is available, this individual may be able to offer some theoretical perspectives. Try to avoid being too prescriptive in ways that might restrict individual expression and creativity. Instead, develop ideals that could be helpful and encouraging to preachers and worship leaders in your church. Try to avoid a spirit of criticism; instead, emphasize working on these guidelines with a spirit of love. When a satisfactory list has been developed, share this with your church’s preachers, elders, or worship committee.

“Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; . . . it is walking by faith . . . it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 51.

“What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ’s sake? It was union with God, . . . with the Holy Spirit, . . . with Christ. Reproach and persecution have separated many from earthly friends, but never from the love of Christ.”—Page 85.

“[These] consecrated messengers . . . allowed no thought of self-exaltation to mar their presentation of Christ. . . . They coveted neither authority nor pre-eminence.”—Page 209.

“By idolatry he [Paul] meant not only the worship of idols, but self-serving, love of ease, the gratification of appetite and passion.”—Page 317.

Discussion Questions:

1. In class talk about all the reasons we have for faith. What “proofs” do we have for what we believe? What rational and logical evidence do we have that helps to affirm us in our beliefs? At the same time, what are the challenges to our faith? In the end, even despite these challenges, why do we believe what we do?

2. Think about some of the most powerful worship services you ever have attended. What made them so special, so powerful? What elements in particular made the difference? How can these elements be brought into your local church worship, if they are not there already?

3. What are some of the potential ways in which our worship services actually could impede our view of Christ and the Cross? How can we make sure that nothing is allowed to do that?

4. Dwell more on 1 Corinthians 13. What concrete steps can your church take to manifest the love that Paul talks about here?
Lesson 13  *September 17–23

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 worshiping 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 worshiping 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.

CONTINUED
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 worshiping, 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, worshiping Him, in heaven, as well.
Bible Commentary


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
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 worshiping 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).
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 worshiping 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.
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 fellow servant, 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?
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.

“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:

1. 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?

2. What are ways that we worship the Lord when we are not in church service? If we are not worshiping the Lord all the time, can we truly worship him for a few hours on Sabbath? Discuss your answer.

3. What are some good things that we could be in danger of worshiping?