

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 worshipping the true God as He is supposed to be worshiped and one engaging in a false kind of worship. One is acceptable, one is not, and that is because one is based on salvation by faith and the other, as are all false forms of worship, is based on works. It is a motif that will appear again and again throughout the Bible. One type of worship is focused solely on God, on His power and glory and grace, the other on humanity and on self.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.*

Worship in Eden

Genesis 1 records the story of Adam and Eve in their new home. The Creator of the universe had just designed and formed a beautiful new planet, crowning His work with the creation of the first family. The world came from Him 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,

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

“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.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

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.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Thought Questions:**

- ❶ What do you think worship might have been like in Eden, where the presence of God was so much more accessible?
- ❷ 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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 47–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 60–62; “Cain and Abel Tested,” pp. 71–74; “After the Flood,” pp. 105–107; “The Test of Faith,” pp. 148–153; “The Night of Wrestling,” pp. 197–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“[Jacob’s] vow [at Bethel] was the outflow of a heart filled with gratitude for the assurance of God’s love and mercy. Jacob felt that God had claims upon him which he must acknowledge, and that the special tokens of divine favor granted him demanded a return. So does every blessing bestowed upon us call for a response to the Author of all our mercies. The Christian should often review his past life and recall with gratitude the precious deliverances that God has wrought for him. . . . He should recognize all of them as evidences of the watchcare of heavenly angels. In view of these innumerable blessings he should often ask, with subdued and grateful heart, ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?’ Psalm 116:12.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 187.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the topic of how righteousness by faith in what Christ has done for us should be at the center of all our worship. As you do, dwell on these questions: (1) Why do we worship Him? (2) What has He done that makes Him worthy of worship? (3) What purpose does our worship of God serve?
- ❷ How can our worship services become 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?
- ❸ 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?
- ❹ Dwell more on the idea of fear and reverence in worship. Why is this an important element? What’s wrong with an attitude in worship that seems to put God on our own level, in which we relate to Him in worship with the same attitude we have toward a good friend and nothing more?