

Worship and the Exodus:¹ Understanding Who God Is



SABBATH—JULY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Exodus 3:1–15; Exodus 12:1–36; Exodus 20:4, 5; Exodus 32:1–6; Exodus 33:12–23.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of Egypt. That is the land where you were slaves. Do not put any other gods in place of me’ ” (Exodus 20:2, 3, NIV).

JESUS SPOKE TO THE WOMAN AT THE WELL. He said, “ ‘You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know. Salvation comes from the Jews’ ” (John 4:22, NIV). Imagine worshiping what you do not know. In a way, that is what almost all the world has done, or perhaps is doing now. They are worshiping what they do not know. People who make gods out of power, money, fame, and self worship what they do not know. They worship that which cannot save them.

The questions for us as Christians should be, Do we know what we are worshipping? Do we know the Lord whom we praise and honor with our mouths? Who is He? What is His name? What is He like?

This week we will read about early stories of the children of Israel. We will learn how their experiences with the Lord show us who God really is. After all, what sense does it make to worship what we do not know?

1. the Exodus—the act of leaving a place; God, through Moses, brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt.

SUNDAY—JULY 3

HOLY GROUND (Exodus 3:1–15)

For Moses, a burning bush in the wilderness might not have been that strange to see. Moses probably had seen things like that before. But what he had never seen before was a burning bush that did not burn up. It kept burning and burning. At that moment Moses knew that he was seeing a “great sight,” something very unusual.



The burning bush that Moses saw kept burning and burning but did not burn up.

What important truths about worship does Exodus 3:1–15 teach us?

Right from the start, we notice the holiness of God in these verses. We also notice the kind of spirit we need to have in coming into His presence. It was God who told Moses to take off his

shoes, for this was holy ground. The Lord was making clear the sharp difference between Himself and Moses, a sinner in need of grace.² Deep respect, awe, and fear are the attitudes (feelings) that are important to have when we take part in true worship.

Another important point of true worship is the God-centeredness (keeping God as the center) of this experience. Moses' first answer to God was, “Who am I that I should go?” His focus was on himself—his needs, his weaknesses, and his fears. But soon afterward, Moses changed the focus from himself to God and what God would do. How important it is that all worship centers on the Lord, not on ourselves!

That leads to another important point about worship. Worship is salvation and deliverance (freedom from sin). The Exodus from Egypt has stood as a symbol (word-picture) for the salvation that we all have in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1–4). God was not appearing to Moses just to make Himself known. God was appearing to Moses in order to let him know of the great work of salvation that He was going to do for the sake of the children of Israel. In the same way, Jesus did not come to this earth just to represent God and help us to know more about Him. No, Jesus came to die for our sins. Jesus came to give His life in order to set us free. Jesus came to die on the cross the death that we deserve. Through Jesus' death we know more and more about who God is. But in the end Christ came to pay

2. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us, through our faith, to take away our sins.

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the penalty for our sins. In the end, Christ came to give us true freedom from sin. What God did for Israel is a symbol of the freedom that He gives to us. Just as He freed the nation from Egypt, He frees us from sin.

How much time do you spend thinking about the Cross and the freedom that we have been given through Jesus? Or do you spend more time thinking about other things, things that cannot save you? What does your answer suggest to you?



God told Moses to take off his shoes for he was standing on holy ground. This shows that we need to be humble in God's presence.

MONDAY—JULY 4

THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN: PASSOVER³ AND WORSHIP (Exodus 12:27)

The Hebrew word *worshiped* in the above verse is translated from a root

(another, older word) that means “to bow down” or “to prostrate [lie flat on the ground face down] oneself.” The word itself almost always appears in a verb form that means “repeating” or “doing something again and again.” One almost could imagine a person bowing up and down, up and down, in deep respect and thankfulness to God.



The word *worshiped* in Exodus 12:27 means “to bow oneself down.”

Read the story of that first Passover night, in Exodus 12:1–36. The gospel should be at the center of all our worship. How is the gospel shown in these verses?

If the sides of their doors were not covered by the blood, the children of Israel would face the loss of their firstborn children. For them, the firstborn (usually meaning the oldest son) had special rights and responsibilities. But

³ Passover—the event in which angels flew over the Israelites' homes and avoided killing the Israelites' firstborn children before the people left Egypt.

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later the firstborn sons were replaced by the Levites⁴ (Numbers 3:12). Israel itself was said to be the Lord's "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). This symbolizes (shows) Israel's special relationship (connection) to the Creator God. In the New Testament, Jesus is sometimes called the "firstborn" (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18). Here in Exodus 12:1–36, we read how the Israelites' firstborn children were saved. But Christ "the firstborn" was to die. His death was symbolized by the blood placed over the doors of the houses. This act stands as a powerful example of Jesus' death as our Substitute.⁵ Jesus died so that the "firstborn," meaning all God's saved people (see Hebrews 12:23), would escape 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 loving and thankful heart to the One who alone has power to save. How can you learn to better appreciate and love the Lord? How is sin likely to destroy that love?

TUESDAY—JULY 5

NO OTHER GODS (Exodus 20:1–6)

Imagine the scene: Mount Sinai covered with a thick cloud and quaking with thunder, lightning flashing, trumpets blasting. The people shook with fear. Smoke filled the air because the God of Israel had come down in fire upon the holy mount (Exodus

19:16–19). There among the cloud and the smoke, God showed Himself in great glory (power). Then the voice of their Savior announced the first four commandments (rules), all of which are directly connected to worship.

What important points about worship can we take from Exodus 20:1–6?

The Ten Commandments start with God's reminder to the children of Israel of their freedom from sin. Only the Lord, the true God, the only God, could do that for them. All other gods, such as the gods of Egypt, were false gods. These false gods were created by humans and were unable to save anyone. In the stories about them, these "gods" often showed unrighteous (unholy) thoughts and feelings and actions. These qualities showed that they had been created by humans. Unlike these false gods, the Lord is a loving and self-sacrificing Creator and Savior. For many hundreds of years the children of Israel were influenced (led) to believe in many gods from the nations that surrounded them. So, now the children of Israel needed to know their Lord and God as the only God. This was especially true as they were entering into the covenant⁶ 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 learn from the

4. Levites—members of the tribe of Levi, who were workers in the sanctuary, or the temple of God.

5. Substitute—someone who takes the place of another person; in this case, Jesus took our place on the cross.

6. covenant—a promise, or an agreement, between God and His people.

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principle (important rule) there and use it for ourselves today?

Ellen G. White wrote, “There may be things that we hold dear to our hearts, but they lessen our love for God or prevent [stop] us from serving God. These things are our false gods.”—Adapted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*,⁷ page 305. Ask yourself: What are the gods in my life that are testing my love for the true God? How can I remove them?



Anything that lessens our love for God is a false god.

WEDNESDAY—JULY 6

“THESE BE YOUR GODS . . .”
(Exodus 32:1–6)

Read Exodus 32:1–6 and answer the following questions:

1. What event first opened the way to this powerful example of false worship? What lessons should we as Seventh-day Adventists take from it?

2. What was this false god made of? What does that say about how fruitless this kind of worship is?

3. How was their worship of this idol different from their worship of the Lord?

They “rose up to play.” They “have corrupted [sinned against] themselves”; they “have turned aside [fallen into sin] quickly” (Exodus 32:6–8). This does not show true worship, does it?

The mixed crowd (Egyptians who had chosen to go with Israel in the Exodus or who were married to Hebrews) influenced the people and required of Aaron the form and style of worship that they knew well in Egypt. When Joshua heard the noise from below, he came to Moses and suggested that there was war in the camp. But Moses had lived in the royal court of Egypt. So, he knew all too well what those noises were. He probably recognized the sounds of dancing, the loud music, the singing, shouting, and general confusion that came with the worship of idols (Exodus 32:17–22).

When they worshiped the true God, they did so with proper respect. But now, worshiping before this calf of gold, they acted like animals. They had “traded their glorious [beautiful and powerful] God for a statue of a bull that eats grass” (Psalm 106:19, 20, NIV). As a rule, it seems to be that we rise no higher than that which we worship.

7. Patriarchs and Prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, men such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

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Notice how quickly and easily they gave up 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?

THURSDAY—JULY 7

“SHOW ME YOUR GLORY” (Exodus 33:12–23)

In the golden-calf experience, the people of Israel had broken their covenant (agreement) with God. They had taken His name in vain by their sinful and false worship. Moses pled with God for their sake (Exodus 32:30–33). Because of their terrible sin, God commanded His “stiffnecked [stubborn]” people to remove their ornaments (jewels) so that He might “know what to do” to them (Exodus 33:4, 5). The people who had repented⁸ and removed their ornaments showed that they were restored to oneness with God (Exodus 33:4–6).

Read Exodus 33:12–23. Moses asked God for a special request. Why do you think Moses did this? What did Moses want to learn? Why did he believe that he needed these things?

Moses’ desire to see God’s glory was not because he was curious. Instead, it came from a deep heart hunger to sense God’s presence after such a shameful falling back into sin

by God’s people. Moses had not taken part in their sin. But he was affected by it. We do not live separately (apart) from other members of our church. What influences (guides) one affects others. This is an important point that we should never forget.

Look carefully at Exodus 33:13. Moses tells God that he, Moses, wants to “know Him.” Even though the Lord has done so much, Moses still senses his own need, his own weakness, his own helplessness. So, he wants a closer walk with the Lord. He wants to know better the God upon whom he is so dependent. How interesting that, many hundreds of years later, Jesus says, “ ‘And what is eternal life? It is knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ ” (John 17:3, NIV). Moses wants to see the glory of God, something that would make him understand even more his own sinfulness and helplessness. In this way he would depend more fully upon the Lord. After all, look at what God asks Moses to do. Look at the challenges that Moses has to face. No wonder that Moses feels this need to know God.

Here, too, we come to a very important point about worship. Worship should be about God. It should be about our having humble faith and surrendering to God. We should try to know more about Him and His “way” (Exodus 33:13).

How well do you know the Lord? More important, what choices can you make that will help you to know

8. repented—to feel sorry for one’s sins and to turn away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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Jesus better than you do? How can you learn to worship in a way that will give you a better understanding of God and His glory?

FRIDAY—JULY 8

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pages 303–314; “Idolatry⁹ at Sinai,” pages 315–330; “Satan’s Enmity [Hate] Against the Law,” pages 331–342, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; Psalm 105:26–45; Psalm 106:8–23.

“All people need to be humble and show deep respect [honor] when they come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him in good faith. But we must not treat Him as if 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, as someone less important than they. There are those who conduct [act] themselves in God’s house as they would not dare to do in front of an earthly king or governor. They should remember that they are in the presence of God whom angels worship and before whom they veil [cover] their faces. God is to be deeply respected and worshiped. All who truly understand God’s presence will bow humbly before Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 252.

“True respect for God is inspired by knowing God’s unlimited greatness and understanding His presence. With this sense of God’s unseen presence,

every heart should be deeply impressed [made deeply aware of]. The hour and place of prayer are holy because God is there. . . . When angels speak of God, they veil their faces. With what kind of respect, then, should we, who are fallen and sinful, speak of God!” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 48, 49.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Discuss these parts of God’s character (who God is): His nearness to us and His greatness and holiness. Think of ways these two important truths about God can both be pointed to and balanced in our worship services.
- 2 What lessons can we learn from the sad story of Israel’s worship of the golden calf and the serious results that come from worshiping false gods? What are some of the idols that are commonly worshiped in your society? What lessons do you find in this story for the church today, especially for Seventh-day Adventists 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 understand (know) the greatness, the glory, and the power of God? Or do they 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 answer? In other words, how can a human being come to know God personally?

9. idolatry—the worshiping of false gods.