

## **Worship**

### **Worship and the Exodus: Understanding Who God Is**

Lesson #2 for July 9, 2011

Scriptures: Exodus 3:1-15; 12:1-36; 20:4,5; 32:1-6; 33:12-23.

1. What God do you worship? Or more precisely, what mental picture of God do you have? Do you understand Him correctly? Completely? This, of course, is impossible for human beings! But, is your mental picture of God as true as possible? Or, is it an idol? If your picture of God has not changed in the last year, you are worshiping an idol! How can we be certain that our picture of God is the best it can be? Does it include information from all of Scripture? How often do we picture God as a bigger version of ourselves?
2. The Jews in biblical times believed that they knew the God they were worshiping. By contrast, Jesus told the woman of Samaria and Paul told the people of Athens that they were worshiping unknown gods! (John 4:22; Acts 17:23) Why would someone worship an unknown god? Fire insurance? Was it that their known gods made of stone, metal, or wood had proved useless? Isaiah clearly presented the foolishness of worshiping gods that one had made with his own hands! (Isaiah 44:9-20) How ignorant can we be?
3. How do we form our picture of God? Look at some of the early encounters with God in Scripture: Adam and Eve (Genesis 2,3); the three strangers who visited Abraham (Genesis 18); and Noah (Genesis 6-8). What kind of God is suggested by these stories?
4. Do we really know who God is? Do we understand His character and His government? What is He really like? What has God done to reveal and explain Himself?
5. How often had Moses seen a bush on fire in the desert? Were there frequent lightning storms? How long did Moses watch the bush before he decided it was not being consumed? Bushes burn quickly! Under ordinary circumstances, if one was herding sheep in an area filled with bushes and one of the bushes started to burn, wouldn't he run?
6. Why did God ask Moses to take off his shoes? Was that the custom that Moses had learned in Egypt as a show of reverence? Read Exodus 3:1-15. What does this experience teach us about God? Why did God choose this method of revealing Himself? There are several important points we should learn from this experience: 1) God was making clear the distinction between Himself—our holy God—and Moses, a sinful human being. 2) God was making it very clear to Moses that He was the One who should be in charge. The entire experience should be God-centered. Moses' first response was, "Who am I that I should go?" This is a natural self-centered response from a human being. Eventually, Moses looked beyond himself and recognized God's leadership and guidance. 3) The exodus was an experience that represents salvation and deliverance. God was not just appearing there to make Himself known to Moses; He had a very definite purpose in mind.
7. How does this experience compare with the experience of Jesus coming to this earth? Did Jesus come primarily to teach us about God? Or, did He come to pay the penalty for our sins? Consider the implications of paying the penalty: 1) To whom would the penalty be paid? 2) What was the price? 3) Who was demanding that it be paid?
8. The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the

evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men [and women] of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of **the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God.** In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” **When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.** *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890 (2ST 351:2:0-3:1); compare *ST* December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 359; *RH* August 14, 1900; *YI* November 21, 1883; John 17:3. (Note that content inside brackets is added)

Jesus came and showed mankind the truth about God, and humans began to realize how much bigger the issues were than what they had thought. The truth about God is awesome! If we really understand this, we will want to be like Him. And Jesus gives us the pattern. Jesus is in the teaching business, not in the debt-paying business! So, what should we be doing?

9. Remember that the children of Israel had been living in Egypt for about 200 years. They had been forced into slavery for approximately half of that time. In ancient times, it was believed that a nation’s success in its conflicts with other nations was a proof of the superiority of their gods. Under those circumstances, who would have respect for the God of a bunch of slaves?
10. Thus, it was necessary for the God of heaven to set up a showdown between the false Egyptian gods and Himself. (Exodus 12:12) One by one, *Yahweh* turned the Egyptian gods into plagues. What happened to Egypt became legendary among the surrounding nations. (Joshua 2:8-13)
11. Consider the differences between the encounter that the children of Israel had with God as He descended on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:18-20) and the golden calf experience some 40 days later. (Exodus 32) Which kind of experience are you more attracted to? The reverence, respect, and perhaps in some cases even fear at the foot of Mount Sinai? Or, the dancing, drunkenness, and nakedness around the golden calf? What modern equivalents might we be able to think of? What emotional highs or lows were connected with each of those experiences? Do they teach us about a majestic Ruler, an almighty Deliverer, a loving Father, or a God that we do not really understand or know?
12. What should we learn from the experience of the Passover in Egypt? First of all, it was the ultimate conflict between *Yahweh* and the Egyptian gods who were expected to protect the firstborn. The Israelites were given specific instructions about how they were to prepare themselves in their homes for that Passover. By the time the Passover instructions were given, the children of Israel had begun to look up. They had begun to recognize that their

God was superior to the Egyptian gods. And when the Passover instructions were given, they bowed in worship. They were instructed to kill a lamb and to spread the blood on the door posts, to eat only unleavened bread for a week, and to carry off the wealth of the Egyptians! They were also instructed to make sure they ate or burned every part of the lamb.

13. What does the Passover ceremony teach us about the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus? Or, does it teach something else? In Scriptures we read that Israel was to be God's firstborn. (Exodus 4:22) Later, God designated the Levites as His firstborn. (Numbers 3:12) But, in New Testament times, Jesus is referred to as the Firstborn. (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15,18) Do we conclude from reading these verses that, in fact, ultimately the real Firstborn did die? Do you find this to be a powerful representation of the substitutionary death of Jesus? How did the Passover experience affect the attitude of the Jewish people toward God? The Egyptians were terrified and certain that they all were about to die.
14. When the children of Israel reached Sinai, they were instructed to prepare to meet their God. Read Exodus 19:1-17. Seventh-day Adventists have always suggested that the first four commandments are about our relationship to God, and the last six are about our relationship to our fellow man. What do the first four commandments tell us about God? (Exodus 20:3-11) The first commandment tells us to worship God *exclusively*. The second commandment tells us to worship God *directly* and not through any substitutes. The third commandment tells us to worship God *sincerely* and not flippantly or disrespectfully. The fourth commandment tells us to worship God *with all our hearts, regularly, and repeatedly, every seventh day*. If we add Deuteronomy 5 when God repeated the giving of the Ten Commandments, it was to remind the children of Israel of their deliverance from Egypt. What does Deuteronomy 5 tell us?
15. The children of Israel had just been freed from Egypt where the Egyptian gods represented enlargements of human characteristics such as selfishness, immorality, arbitrariness, etc. Unthinking blocks of stone which made no demands on them were to be given up, and the Supreme Intelligence of the universe was to take their place. Have we made any idols for ourselves in modern times? Do we truly worship the real God?
16. "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. 305.4; *SD* 56.5.
17. In our day, so much of what we call worship is scheduled. We attend church on Sabbath morning. We have other scheduled events during the week. Do we ever have sudden, unexpected encounters with God? Do we recognize that everything that happens to us all week long is just part of a God-centered reality? Do we recognize our total dependence upon Him?
18. Why did the children of Israel want a golden calf to worship? After the Sinai experience? All their previous experiences with gods in their lives had been tied to a visible presence. Even when they left behind the stone idols of Egypt, they turned their attention to focus on Moses their leader. But, when Moses disappeared into the fire and cloud on the top Mount Sinai, they were suddenly afraid they had lost their god. No doubt, it was the mixed multitude—those Egyptians who had followed the children of Israel out of Egypt or, perhaps, in some cases were actually married to Israelite spouses—who probably initiated this demand for a visible god. What do you think of a god which is made out of earrings? How did their worship of this golden calf contrast with their recent experience when they encountered the God who came down on Mount Sinai?

19. Read Exodus 32:6-8. Does this conversation between God and Moses sound in any way familiar? Does this sound like two parents arguing over the behavior of their children?
20. Why do you think they chose a bull calf as a symbol? Notice carefully that they called this bull calf *Yahweh*. "They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an animal that eats grass." Psalm 106:20, *GNB*.
21. There is a technical name for this process. It is called 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." (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 25) They were trying to marry the worship of *Yahweh* with the fertility cult worship forms from Egypt with which they were familiar.
22. What were Aaron's thoughts as he was making that golden calf? Was he afraid that Moses was dead? Did he think that perhaps he would be the new leader of Israel? Or, was he just trying to appease the people to prevent riots until Moses returned? Did Aaron think that he accomplished his task by offering only a single false god instead of the many that they had asked for and by suggesting that it was *Yahweh*? What did Aaron think when the drinking, dancing, and sexual orgies started?
23. After the golden calf experience had more or less quieted down and a new set of tables of stone had been written, Moses asked God to show him His glory. (Exodus 33:12-23) For what was Moses asking? Was he just curious? Or, was he seeking an ever closer relationship with *Yahweh*? After having the experience with the burning bush, was he expecting a bigger fire? Read Exodus 33:13 and John 17:3. Do you see a comparison in these verses? Could we conclude that worship is about knowing God better? Do we really want to know God better? How can we get to know Him better? Isn't that why Jesus came to this earth? (See #8 above)
24. If we really knew God in all His majesty, power, love, and friendship, could we ever go back to idolatry?
25. Read Revelation 14:6,7 in one of the more traditional translations. What does it mean to *fear God*? Is that terror? Or, is it reverence?
26. Did the children of Israel have incredibly short memories? Did they think that the golden bull calf could have been responsible for the plagues of Egypt?
27. What about us and the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Why do you think Ellen White said, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." {*Life Sketches* 196.2}
28. What kind of idols do you see people around you worshiping every day? Are there any idols which are acceptable in your church community? Among your fellow workers or business associates? Could modern-day idolatry be keeping us out of the kingdom of heaven?
29. Those of us who believe in the great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation believe that knowing God is the most important thing that we can do. Do we know and understand Him correctly?

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