

Worship

Happy Are You, O Israel!

Lesson #5 for July 30, 2011

Scriptures: Leviticus 9; 10:1-11; Revelation 20:9; Deuteronomy 33:26-29; 1 Samuel 1; 15:22,23.

1. This lesson is about worship, obedience, and fire coming down from heaven.
2. The last half of the book of Exodus tells us about the construction of the tent-sanctuary in the desert. At the end of that experience, the cloud of God's glory filled the recently completed tent-sanctuary; not even Moses could go inside. (Exodus 40:34,35) Was this light? Or, heat? Or, something else? Were they uncomfortable in God's presence?
3. But, the official services had not yet begun. The events recorded in the book of Leviticus happened during the next month. (Exodus 40:17; Numbers 1:1) In Leviticus 1:1-7:38, Moses was given specific laws about offerings and sacrifices. Notice two very interesting things in Leviticus 1-7: 1) Repeatedly, when talking about sacrifices, it states, "When you offer," "If you are offering," "If you offer," or "When any of you offer." In other words, there are no specific commands in those chapters requiring them to offer sacrifices. (Micah 6:6-8; Jeremiah 7:22-26; Romans 12:1,2) These sacrifices pointed forward to the death of Jesus. Was that also optional? Certainly not! Few of them seemed to get the message anyway! 2) There is a great deal of instruction about "unintentional" sins. (Leviticus 4:2,22,27; 5:1-5;15-18; 22:14) What is an unintentional sin? (Romans 2) If sin is rebellion or lawlessness, (1 John 3:4; Romans 14:23) then how can a sin be unintentional? And what happens if the sin is intentional? (Numbers 15:30-36; Deuteronomy 17:12,13) Are unintentional sins one-time occurrences rather than patterns of behavior? Any intentional sin was to be punished by death! How many of us would still be alive under those circumstances? Was God trying to teach all of us about how serious sin is?
4. The next section of Leviticus (Leviticus 8:1-10:20) discusses the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests. See especially Leviticus 9:22-24. After having completed the required sacrifices—for the first time apparently—Aaron, being instructed by Moses, lifted up his hands; and Moses and Aaron entered the tent-sanctuary. We are not sure exactly what happened inside. However, it is likely that Moses was instructing Aaron—based on his conversations with God—about the use of each of the individual pieces of furniture inside. We do not know if they entered the most holy place and, perhaps, even saw the ark, also known as the covenant box. But, when they returned to the outside, "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." (Leviticus 9:24, *NKJV*) That fire was supposed to be kept going perpetually.
5. It is clear that this was a very impressive time. Within a few days, God's glory had come down and entered the tent-sanctuary on at least two occasions. Remember, of course, that God's presence in the form of the fire by night and the cloud by day was always visible. What are we supposed to learn about God from those experiences? When the people "fell on their faces," was it an expression of intense worship or perhaps fear? (Compare Exodus 20:18-20) Have any of us had an experience similar to that?
6. This series of lessons is about worship. We have already suggested that worship involves respect and reverence for something that we value or consider to be of very great worth. But, as we know, people have worshiped almost every imaginable thing down through the generations. Isaiah 5:20,21 suggest that the time came when they called evil good and called good evil! How do you suppose that happened? Other than the obvious involvement of Satan, what factors led them to do that?
7. In general, there are two kinds of worship described in Scripture. There is self-centered worship, otherwise known as pure selfishness; and there is God-centered worship, otherwise known as

love. There is our way, and there is God's way.

8. In this lesson we will discuss the cases of Nadab and Abihu, Saul, and Lucifer. Clearly, these individuals placed self before God. By contrast, we will look at the cases of Moses, Aaron, and Hannah who clearly set aside their own selfishness and submitted in reverence to God's way of love.
9. Turn now to the story of Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus 10:1-11) What happened in this story? Why weren't their clothes burned up? Leviticus 10:9 suggests that the problem may have had something to do with alcohol. Ellen White considerably expands on that idea. In effect, she stated that those two young man had become almost drunk, had lost their clear thinking, and entered the tent-sanctuary with "common fire" rather than the fire sent from heaven that God had specified to be used. They also used incense which was not of the type which God had specified. (*Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* 18.2; *Historical Sketches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* 208.1; *1 Spirit of Prophecy* 277.1; *4a Spiritual Gifts* 11.3; *Review and Herald*, July 29, 1873, par. 5; *Youth's Instructor*, June 4, 1903 par. 4)
10. Nadab and Abihu were the two older sons of Aaron. They were the ones to work most closely with him in carrying out the duties of the priests. They should have been the ones to take Aaron's place when he died. But, they clearly forfeited all of that by behavior which was typified by this episode of disregarding God's direct instructions. If this happened in your church, how would you respond?
11. Is this story supposed to teach us that God is very, very strict—even arbitrary—about His commands? Consider several factors. (Leviticus 10:6-11) God was establishing a new nation, the nation of Israel, and a new form of worship in connection with the tent-sanctuary. Two of the earliest and very important individuals involved in this process felt comfortable completely ignoring God's instructions about how things should be done. How long do you think it would have been before the people and future priests would have been doing whatever they felt like doing? Can you scare the "hell" out of someone? It seemed to work for a little while. But, it never lasts. If it did, God should have "scared" the Devil back in heaven before this earth was created!
12. When Moses and Aaron carefully fulfilled God's directions to the letter, God was pleased; fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering. (Leviticus 9:22-24) When Aaron's sons misbehaved and misrepresented God and entered the tent with strange incense and common fire in their censers, fire came down from God and consumed them!
13. How many times are recorded in which God sent fire directly out of heaven to this earth? Apparently, fire came down on the top of Mount Sinai before the giving of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 19) In our study for today, we have noted two occasions: fire came down from heaven to consume the burnt offering; (Leviticus 9:24) and a short time later, fire came down to burn up Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus 10:2) Many years later, we are told that fire came down from heaven on the top of Mount Carmel in response to Elijah's prayer before all the children of Israel. That fire consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the water, and left a black hole in the earth! (1 Kings 18:38) When King Ahaziah of Israel sent troops to get Elijah, fire came down from heaven and consumed the troops—twice! (2 Kings 1:10,12) Our *Bible Study Guide* points out that fire will come down from heaven to consume the wicked as described in Revelation 20:9; contrast Revelation 13:13. How does this fit with Isaiah 66:22-24 which says that the fire will be consuming dead bodies? If Jesus died the death of sinners, was He burned up? Ellen White describes that fire at the end of time as a fire that cleanses the earth. [Compare *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, p. 217, 218 (1858); *Early Writings* 294,295 (revised 1882); *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 47-49 (1884) and *Great Controversy* 672, 673 (1888)]
14. There are those who suggest that fear is a great motivator. However, careful students of the Bible will realize that while it motivates temporarily, fear never produces obedience or motivation that lasts very long. Consider the experience of Israel at Sinai. (Exodus 19, 20, 32) If God could

scare us into permanent obedience, He should have done so back in the very beginning of rebellion in heaven and avoided the entire great controversy. But, the motivation of fear never lasts very long, and it has other undesirable consequences.

15. A careful reading of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy suggests that God requires very strict obedience. (Deuteronomy 6:4) If God is “One,” are both good and bad caused by Him? How are we supposed to understand such passages? Is God testing us to see if we will do things His way instead of our own way? How often do we find it convenient to give God what we think He wants or what we can spare or what we are willing to part with instead of what He says He wants? It should be clear that what God wants most of all is our heart, soul, and mind in full, thoughtful obedience. Is this an unreasonable demand? If God knows that His requirements are always for our best good, is it reasonable for Him to be strict about them? Is it always best for us to do what is right?
16. Turn now to the story of Moses and the rock. (Numbers 20:1-12) What was happening in this story? Did Moses become upset and angry? Was this a case of open rebellion against God? If God did not intend for Moses to strike the rock, why did He ask Moses and Aaron to take the rod from the most holy place with them to the rock? Was it a symbol of God’s action? Does it seem fair that Moses should be prevented from entering the land of Canaan just because of this one incident? After 120 years of preparation and leadership, should one episode of disobedience disqualify him from entering the promised land? Read carefully the wording of Numbers 20:12. Notice that it does not talk about anger, rebellion, or even disobedience. It says, “Because you did not have enough faith in me...” What are the implications of those words? Remember that *faith* is a word we used to describe a relationship with God as with a good friend. What Moses did was to misrepresent God. Was Moses taking credit for what God did? Was Moses just repeating what he did in Exodus 17:5,6?
17. On previous occasions, Moses had done a wonderful job of representing God correctly. (See Exodus 32:7-14; Deuteronomy 9:6-13,26-29; Numbers 14:11-16) But, on this occasion, he made it sound like he and Aaron were the ones who had led the children of Israel out of Egypt. By misrepresenting God, he had done essentially the same thing that Lucifer had done in heaven! That is rebellion! But, Moses did not complain. He accepted God’s verdict despite asking some questions—which God always allows. It is important to note that when Moses climbed to the top of Mount Nebo and looked out over the land of Canaan, he was given a vision of the entire land so that he actually saw where the children of Israel were going. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 477) Three days after Moses died and after God contended with the Devil over his body, (Jude 9) God resurrected Moses and took him—not to this sinful, earthly Canaan, but to the heavenly Canaan! Do you think Moses has any regrets? How do you think Moses describes this whole experience when the angels ask him about it? Would things have been different for the Israelites in Canaan if Moses had not struck the rock? Would they have driven out the Canaanites?
18. Read Isaiah 5:18-23. “It has been said that reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 59) Every one of us grows up with certain ideas about what is right and what is wrong along with other cultural norms and beliefs. How do we go about setting those standards? Are you sure that your standards are biblical? All of us have a scale from the worst evil we can imagine to the very best good we can imagine. We even have scales for people from Hitler, Stalin, and Idi Amin, all the way to Mother Teresa—perhaps, we should say from Satan to Jesus. Are our standards fair and reasonable? How do we go about setting those standards? Can we change them?
19. Read 1 Samuel 1. The story of Elkanah, Hannah, and Peninnah is a familiar one. Hannah, being childless, was so discouraged and depressed that when she went up to the tent-sanctuary on one of the feast days, she went to the tent opening and prayed quietly to herself. Eli, the high priest at the time, saw her there and accused her of being drunk. But, God blessed Hannah and gave her the son she asked for. That son, Samuel, became one of the great leaders of the

children of Israel. This story reminds us that the God of the universe still cares about each one of us individually. When we have the kind of relationship with Him that we should have, He responds to us. What does this teach us about worship?

20. We now turn to King Saul and his experience with the Amalekites. Read 1 Samuel 15. It is very clear that Saul considered his opinion more important than the guidance he received from God through Samuel. This is a clear case of self-worship versus God-worship.

21. Was the choice of Saul to be the first king of Israel a mistake? Didn't God choose him? How do you understand the following passages: 1 Samuel 15:10,11,29,35? It seems clear that in choosing Saul as the first king of Israel, God was not choosing the kind of person He wanted; but rather, He was yielding to the wishes of the people and choosing the kind of king they wanted. Saul was never God's first choice. What should we learn about worship from this experience of Saul's rejection of God and God's rejection of Saul? Read 1 Samuel 15:22,23.

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. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, July 28)

22. God gave us His instructions including the Ten Commandments to make it clear what kind of people are safe to admit to the heavenly kingdom.

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng. *Christ's Object Lessons* 315; *God's Amazing Grace* 148 (1900)

What would it be like if God admitted a lot of selfish people into heaven? How long would it be before things would be back to where they are now? So, God can only admit to heaven people who are truly loving and choose to be loving because they understand why that is essential.

23. Each one of us must make a permanent, final decision: Will we worship in our own ways, our own thoughts, our own desires, and practice self-worship and selfishness? Or, will we—with prayer, submission, and reverent awe—see the superiority of God's ways and choose them and worship God in the correct way so that we can, one day, be among His saved people?

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