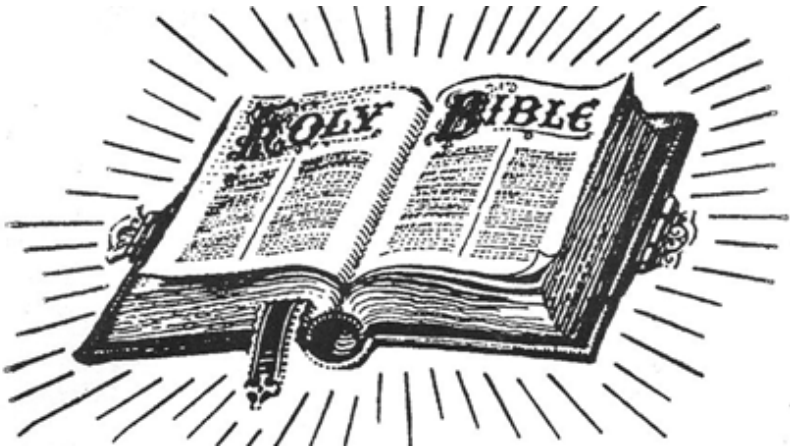


Bible Lessons



“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

Volume 49, No 1

January • February • March

2017

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Volume 49

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No 1

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Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church

Edited by Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

In This Issue: *Reflections* contributed by

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR FIRST QUARTER, 2017

THEME FOR FIRST QUARTER

TRUE WORSHIP

My heart has been seeking God earnestly for inspiration for this new series of Bible Lessons. Slowly, as I have waited on Him, a theme began to develop as He brought Scriptures to my heart and connected them together. There was a burden about idolatry, and I saw how the entire Bible addresses this serious issue. There was a yearning to know His heart and His will concerning our worship toward Him. These lessons have developed from that burden and that yearning. My prayer is that God will burn these truths deep upon our hearts, and our worship will truly be *only unto Him, in spirit and in truth--just as He is seeking for it to be.*

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

JANUARY 1, 2017

CREATED AND CALLED TO WORSHIP

II Kings 17:36 But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice.

37 And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods.

Psalm 33:8 Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

Psalm 95:6 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

Psalm 99:5 Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.

Matthew 4:10 Then saith Jesus. . . it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

John 4:23 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.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Revelation 14:6 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,

7 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.

MEMORY VERSE: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. —Revelation 4:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: From beginning to end, the Scriptures call us to worship, reverence, glorify and serve the Lord God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

II Kings 17:36 “Stretched out arm”: “1. The *finger of God* denotes any manifestation of the Divine power, where effects are produced beyond the power of art or nature. 2. The *hand of God* signifies the same power, but put forth in a more signal manner. 3. *The arm of God*, the Divine omnipotence manifested in the most stupendous miracles. 4. The *arm of God stretched out*, this same omnipotence exerted in a continuation of stupendous miracles, both in the way of judgment and mercy. In this latter sense it appears to be taken in the text: the judgments were poured out on the Egyptians; the mercies wrought in favor of the Israelites.” —Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*. “Worship”: bow self down; crouch; fall down flat; humbly beseech; do reverence.

II Kings 17:36-37 “Fear”: show reverence; stand in awe; be afraid.

Psalms 95:6 “Bow down”: bow self down; kneel, as if bending down to drink; bring low; prostrate.

Psalms 99:5 “Exalt”: extol; “To raise in words or eulogy; to praise; to exalt in commendation; to magnify.” —*Webster’s Dictionary 1828*. “At his footstool”: at His feet.

Matthew 4:10 “Serve”: worship; minister to; to render religious service or homage. —*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There is no doubt but that God created humankind with several characteristics unique from the animals. He gave us volition, a rationing mind, the ability of speech and a deeper capacity to love, to list several—but this one thing distinguishes man above the others: the deep inclination to worship. There is a spirit in man, and this is the link that connects him to God, Who is a Spirit, and draws him to the search for fellowship. It is a homing instinct that beckons him to his beginning, a longing to render adoration, homage, and service to something—Someone—greater than himself.

The first scriptures in our lesson speak to Israelites who lived in Samaria who were mixing the worship of God with idols. God was reminding them of the covenant He had made with the children of Israel. Then there are several commands from the Psalms, which send out a clear call to worship, bow down to, and praise God alone. Jesus met the devil’s temptation to idolatry with the overcoming blow, “It is written,” citing the command written in Deuteronomy 6:13. He later answered the Samaritan woman’s questions about worship (John 4:23-24), bringing our lesson full circle as He addressed the issue of the polluted worship of the Samaritans and explained the requirements and call to all people for true worship. The last book of the Bible, the Revelation, deals again with apostasy, or the *falling away from* true worship, and gives clear command to worship God alone.

In the Scriptures, from beginning to end, God deals with fallen man’s continual downward slide into apostasy and idolatry and calls him back to redemption and true worship.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Do’s and Don’ts*: In the first verses of our lesson, what four things did God command to do, and what one thing did He forbid?

2. *Positive Action*: In the verses from Psalms, what actions of worship are described? What reason is given for our worship?
3. *Settling the Issue*: Describe the scene containing Jesus' reply to the devil.
4. *Samaria—An Ancient Problem*: What simple words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman give the solution?
5. *The Gospel Message*: What is the essence of the gospel?
6. *Why Am I Here?* Our memory verse explains the purpose for which we were created. What is it?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Remembering our purpose—we were created for His pleasure and glory—should keep us focused and anchored. Years ago, it was erroneously taught that *Earth* was the center of the solar system in which it is placed, and everything revolved around it. Later, the truth of the matter was discovered, that the *Sun* is the true center, and the planets revolve around it. An eternal truth is represented here. **God** is the center. All life revolves around Him. When I begin to think that *I* am the center, everything is corrupted and in chaos.

Truly, He alone is holy; He alone is worthy of our worship, honor and praise. He created us to worship and serve Him. When we stop doing that, our God-given inclination to worship will replace Him with something. But it will be false, empty, and degrading. Our joy, our fulfillment, our *life* is in and through Him. Let us seek to humble ourselves—as one would kneel down to drink from the life-giving stream; let us lift up His name in praise and song; let us bring Him glory and honor every moment of our lives; let us worship Him in spirit and in truth.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Come worship the Lord, The gracious One is He,
 The sound of His voice Is music to me:
 He is reigning victorious, He's the "Ancient of days;"
 Worship Him, He is glorious In His works and His ways;

In all this wide world His name alone is high,
His banner's unfurled in the bright, starry sky.
Of redemption I'm singing, since my night passed away;
Now the joybells are ringing in my soul all the day;

The Infinite One—I glory in His might,
For what he hath done to make wrong hearts right,
He doth give ev'ry blessing, light and life unto all;
Since His name I'm confessing, He doth answer my call;

Oh, glad hour to me to know and worship God;
I'm happy and free through the sin-cleansing flood:
And though dark clouds come sweeping o'er my soul's sunny sky,
I can trust in His keeping, they will soon pass me by;

—by Barney E. Warren
Song #30 in *Melodies of Zion*
published by the Gospel Trumpet Company in 1926
—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

JANUARY 8, 2017

WORSHIP IN ANCIENT TIMES

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:2 ...And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

Children of Enos

Genesis 4:25 And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.

26 And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.

Noah

Genesis 8:20 And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

Abram

Genesis 12:7 And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

Isaac

Genesis 26:24 And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Jacob

Genesis 35:1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.

3 And let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

MEMORY VERSE: By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. —Hebrews 11:21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Bible records the manner in which the

early Patriarchs worshipped God, revealing the ancient elements of worship: building an altar, offering a blood sacrifice as an atonement for transgression, calling upon God, and showing reverence, obedience, and faith.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 4:3 “Offering”: gift, oblation, meat (meal or grain) offering, present, sacrifice; From an unused root meaning *to apportion*, i.e. *bestow*; a donation; euphemistically, tribute; specifically a sacrificial offering (usually bloodless and voluntary).

8:21 “Sweet savour”: quiet, soothing, tranquilizing odor or scent. The smell of complacency, or satisfaction. God’s anger toward sin, which had caused the flood, was now over and all was at peace and rest between heaven and earth.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Cain and Abel—thought by some to have been twin brothers—both brought offerings to God. It is not mentioned whether there were altars built, nor how God chose to display His pleasure or rejection. Much conjecture has been made about this story and why God was displeased with Cain’s offering. Opinions widely differ. Two New Testament scriptures lend some meaning: Hebrews 11:4 tells us that it was “by faith” that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. I John 3:12 alleges that Cain killed Abel because his own works were evil and Abel’s were righteous. Hebrews 11:4 also states that God testified of Abel’s gifts—plural—suggesting that he and Cain both brought a grain offering, which was a thanksgiving offering, while Abel’s additional offering of a blood sacrifice demonstrated his acknowledgement of his sinfulness and need for atonement. Cain’s lack of an animal sacrifice seems to reveal an unbelieving, unrepentant heart.

After the rejection of Cain’s sacrifice by God, his angry reaction and violent murder of his brother, God’s dealings with him showed both judgment and mercy. However, instead of repenting and turning to the Lord, Cain chose to go out from God’s presence and establish his own way in the world. From then on, the descendants

of Cain were godless—the sons of men, they were called.

Two hundred and thirty-five years had elapsed between the births of Cain and Enos. There were now thousands of Cain's descendants multiplied upon the earth. Matthew Henry comments:

“The worshippers of God began to do more in religion; some, by an open profession of true religion, protested against the wickedness of the world around... Then began the distinction between professors and profane, which has been kept up ever since, and will be while the world stands.”

Now the distinction between the sons of men and the sons of God—as those who called on the name of the Lord were described—was pronounced, until in the years before the flood, intermarrying between the two led to the condition of men's hearts described in Genesis as “only evil continually,” and only one man, Noah, was left who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He moved with fear (reverence toward God), the Hebrews writer said, and built an ark at God's command, saving his children and the animals from the world-wide flood. Emerging from the ark, Noah demonstrated his need for and belief in God's atonement for sin and his thanksgiving for Divine preservation from the great flood.

The years following the flood, as mankind began following their wicked hearts once more, saw great advancements in the worship of man-made deities, the sun, moon, and stars, and other elements of nature. Again, in the midst of a world of idolatry, there was just one man, Abraham, who sought for and worshipped the true God, and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob continued to build altars in worship to God. To Abraham and to his seed God established the promise of the coming Savior, who would bless the entire earth with His salvation.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Firstlings and the Fat*: What principle does this provide for us to follow in our worship today?
2. *Eve's Hope*: What seed is Eve referring to when she spoke of her son Seth? What does this suggest as to her thoughts or belief in God's promise?

3. *A Sweet Savor*: What characteristics in Noah's life and offering brought about the pleasure of God?
4. *Answering the Call*: What response did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all give when God appeared to them? What particular response did Jacob give which concerned his household?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

What kind of idolatrous worship surrounded the few ancient believers in the true God? *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says, "Idolatry in ancient times included two forms of departure from the true religion: the worship of false gods, whether by means of images or otherwise; and the worship of Jehovah by means of images. All the nations surrounding ancient Israel were idolatrous, although their idolatry assumed different forms. The early Semites of Mesopotamia worshiped mountains, springs, trees, and blocks of stone, in which the deity was supposed to be in some sense incarnate. The religion of the Egyptians centered mostly about the veneration of the sun and of the Nile, as sources of life. They also had a number of sacred animals: the bull, cow, cat, baboon, crocodile, etc. Some of the deities had human bodies and animal heads. Among the Canaanites, religion took on a very barbarous character. The chief gods were personifications of life and fertility. The gods had no moral character whatsoever, and worship of them carried with it demoralizing practices, including child sacrifice, prostitution, and snake worship. Human and animal images of the deities were worshiped."

After the flood, Nimrod, who built the cities of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar, deified himself as a god above mankind. It has been suggested that the Babylonian god Marduk (Merodach, also referred to as Ba'al), who was regarded as the founder of Babylon, was, in fact, Nimrod deified. When God scattered the inhabitants of Babel, they took the worship of their gods with them. In any culture on earth you can read the mythological stories of their gods and goddess. Although their names differ, many of the stories are very similar. Every culture also has a similar story about a Great Flood. This is because they all came from one place, just as the Bible says, as survivors of that deluge.

Abraham's father and ancestors in Ur of the Chaldees worshiped

Nanna, the moon god, who was worshiped as a distant power that controlled the heavens and the life cycle on earth. He obeyed God's call to leave behind his family, and that included their gods.

Paganism began and flourished as a result of a departure from the worship of the true God, and not the other way around, as some would believe.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

From ancient times it appears that God has had a small, separated, called-out remnant of people who loved and truly worshipped Him through faith. Although we live in what is termed "modern times," we still desire to be a part of that holy remnant.

True worship is not something thin or shallow. Satan thought Job simply worshipped God because of all the blessings and protection that God afforded. He was wrong. When Satan had been empowered to touch all that Job had and had stripped Job of his children and financial prosperity, it is written that Job "...arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Satan, at this point, was expecting Job to curse God to his face. How disappointed he must have been when he heard him bless the name of the Lord.

The altars were erected many times when God was revealed in a time of need. It was a place where they thanked, acknowledged, worshipped and dedicated their lives and futures more deeply to the One who had intervened in their lives.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

JANUARY 15, 2017

ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP IN THE LAW OF MOSES

A People Set Apart for Worship: The Divine Purpose for Deliverance from Egypt

Exodus 3:12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this

shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

18 And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.

Specifications for the Sanctuary

Exodus 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

A Continual Burnt Offering, A Continual Light and a Perpetual Incense

Exodus 29:42 This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee.

43 And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. (Also verses 44-46.)

Leviticus 24:2 Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually.

Exodus 30:1 And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

7 And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.

8 And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.

Free Will Offerings

Leviticus 19:5 If ye offer a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord, ye shall offer it at your own will.

Not After the Pattern of Other Gods

Deuteronomy 12:29 When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land;

30 Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following

them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.

31 Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods...

MEMORY VERSE: 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.
—Exodus 25:22

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In His law, God laid down certain eternal requirements as to what kind of worship He would accept. They were physically carried out in the worship of the tabernacle, but were shadows and figures of our spiritual worship in the New Testament church.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Exodus 3:12 “Upon this mountain”: Mount Horeb, where Moses received his commission. When God brought the children of Israel safely from Egypt and over the Red Sea, they journeyed to the foot of the very same mountain, in the wilderness of Sinai, where God spoke to them and gave them the law. “The first reference to Mt. Sinai in the Bible uses the designation “Horeb” (Exodus 3:1). Of the 17 times this name appears in the Old Testament, mainly in Deuteronomy, only once is it given the designation ‘Mt. Horeb’ (Exodus 33:6), otherwise it is simply ‘Horeb.’ It is apparent from the many times the term is used in reference to events that occurred at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 33:6; Deuteronomy 4:10; 5:2; 9:8; 18:16; 29:1; 1 Kings 8:9), that Horeb is an alternative name for Mt Sinai and not another mountain or area near Mt. Sinai.”

—*biblearcheology.org.*

Exodus 25:8 “Sanctuary”: a consecrated thing or place--chapel, hallowed part, holy place.

Deuteronomy 12:31 “Abomination”: something disgusting,

morally; an abhorrence, especially idolatry, or an idol.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The worship of the true God and His corresponding fellowship and abiding with them was the real purpose for which He delivered His people out of Egypt. In the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, He revealed the pattern for the tabernacle of worship with exact dimensions and specifications of materials, sacrifices, cleansings, clothing, fabrics, times, order, and manner. There is not enough time in our lesson to include all the commands; we have made only a brief outline of a very few of the essential elements of the worship in the tabernacle.

If you go through the entire law, you will see a prevailing theme: holiness unto the Lord. Everything was to be consecrated entirely to God. Every practice was to be holy, every item was to be cleansed and anointed, every sacrifice was to be without blemish, and every person who served was to be dedicated, washed, anointed and atoned for before he could minister.

Concerning the sacrifices of worship, R. R. Byrum writes in *Shadows of Good things*:

“The Levitical sacrifices, excluding those of a special nature such as the Passover, were of five kinds, which are Scripturally divided into two main classes: Sweet-savor Offerings: Burnt, Meat, and Peace; and Sin-Offerings: Sin and Trespass.

“The main idea of the sweet-savor offerings was acceptance and worship. The latter class [Sin offerings] had for its primary purpose the expiation of sin. In the detailed description of all these sacrifices in Leviticus chapters 1 through 7, the sweet-savor sacrifices are described before the sin-offerings, but in practice the sin-offering came first and the worship-offerings afterward, as in the consecration of the priests. (See also 2 Chronicles 29.) Worship cannot be acceptable until atonement is made for sin.”

Another important element in the tabernacle worship was the concept of free will. God truly wanted to be the object of their own choice. The atonement was a necessary requirement for worship; praise, thanksgiving, service and gift-giving was to be entirely voluntary as to the time, frequency, and amount given to God.

Obedience and faith were the underlying characteristics of heart expected by God in the heart of every worshipper. These two qualities motivated the offerings for the atonement of sin, the putting away of false gods and sins of the flesh, and the voluntary offerings of gratitude. They also produced in the heart the perfect hatred of the idolatry and immorality of the nations round about.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Called Out:* What did God want Moses to ask of Pharaoh? What was the reason He wanted His people delivered? (A clue to the real motivation of Pharaoh's refusal and pursuit!)
2. *By the Pattern:* Why do you think it was important for Moses to follow every detail of the pattern God laid out?
3. *Pointing Ahead:* Share what the spiritual meaning of the perpetual atonement, light and incense might be.
4. *Never Coercion:* Share your own feelings as you comprehend how God's perfect way is always to let mankind serve Him by choice.
5. *Not Like the Heathen:* How may this concept apply to our lives today?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Look deeply into the heart of God as you comprehend these concepts. See how His heart longed, not for distant homage and blind worship, but for fellowship! Over and over He expressed His desire to be with them, to dwell among them, to meet with them, and to talk with them. He wanted to be theirs; He wanted them to be His. Not His slaves, but His cherished treasure (Exodus 19:4-6)! The entirety of His laws for them can be summed up in one thing: His desire for their well-being (Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:24-25).

The desires of His heart have not changed today. Nor have His requirements. It is important to note again that atonement and cleansing must come before worship. The "Hey, just worship, just praise Jesus" trend today is completely disregarding God's command. One must be trusting in Jesus' atonement for sin, putting

away the sins of the flesh, and setting apart one's self for God alone. Then and only then can the worship of God, thanksgiving, songs of praise and exalting His Name be acceptable offerings to Him.

"Holiness unto the Lord" is still the law of His house.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." —Psalm 96:9

There has always been a tendency for mankind to try to reduce God to a manageable concept, then to worship that which they've created in their own minds. Yet, we find the scriptures constantly pointing us to God's greatness, consistently lifting our eyes upward and redirecting our hearts to His holiness.

Truly seeing God for who He is puts our lives in perspective and puts true worship in perspective. Our perception of God affects our worship of Him. It influences how we worship Him or whether we worship Him at all.

Isaiah saw a vision of God sitting upon a throne high and lifted up. He heard the seraphims cry, "Holy, holy, holy! The whole earth is full of His glory."

Against this backdrop of God's holiness Isaiah saw his own spiritual condition—a man of unclean lips. He saw the spiritual condition of those around him—people of unclean lips. And he saw that God was their only hope for purity. It wasn't God who needed them. It was they who needed God. Worship is for our benefit, not God's. It is our privilege, not His. We don't do Him a favor by our gathering together. We do ourselves a favor. Worship helps to keep us spiritually calibrated to God's omnipotence and our utter dependence on Him.

There were certain protocols that had to be met when approaching royalty in Bible times and even so today. Is it then not reasonable for there to be a divine protocol when we approach God's throne in worship? We must see Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. That is Who we worship.

Our hearts must be humbled before His majesty. Our minds must be tuned to His authority. Our lives must be clean. Our motives

must be pure. We must be holy as He is holy. Our worship of the Lord must be in the beauty of holiness.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

JANUARY 22, 2017

ISRAEL'S DESCENT INTO IDOLATRY

Acts 7:38 This is he [Moses], that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina [Sinai], and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

II Kings 17:7 For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods,

8 And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

9 And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

10 And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree:

11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger:

12 For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

MEMORY VERSE: ...I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall lothe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.

—Ezekiel 6:9b

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Israel became ungrateful, forgetful and impatient in the wilderness and made a calf of gold; then went farther and served the sun, moon, and stars, Molech, Remphan, and other gods. They made high places and groves, and set up images and burnt incense unto them. They committed abominable deeds, offered their children as sacrifices, and used witchcraft, provoking God to jealous anger and crushing His heart, as an adulterous wife breaks the heart of her husband.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 7:38 “Church in the wilderness”: assembly; congregation. From the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “called out.” This is referring to God’s people having been called out of Egypt. “Lively”: having vital power of itself and exerting the same upon the soul.

“Oracles”: the words or utterances of God. —*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*

Acts 7:40 “Wot”: to know; be aware; perceive.

Acts 7:43 “Tabernacle”: the small tent or house in which was contained the image of the god. “Moloch”: comes from the Hebrew word signifying *king*. “Name of the idol-god of the Ammonites, to which human victims, particularly young children, were offered in sacrifice. According to the description in the *Jalkut* on Jeremiah 7:31,

its image was a hollow brazen figure, with the head of a calf or an ox, and outstretched human arms. It was heated red-hot by fire from within, and the little ones placed in its arms to be slowly burned, while to prevent their parents from hearing their dying cries the sacrificing-priests beat drums." —*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*. "Star": used for the image of Saturn, the ancient, pagan star-god. The Hebrew in this place (Amos 5:26) is, "Chiun your images, the star of your god." "Remphan": Chiun in Hebrew was called Remphan in the language of Egypt. Stephen is quoting here from the *Septuagint*, in which translation the word Chiun is Rephan, easily changed into Remphan, the Coptic (a language spoken in Egypt) name for Saturn or Mars, both of which planets were worshiped as gods of evil influence. Whether Molech, Chiun, Rephan, or Remphan, all are the same with the Serapis of the Egyptians, and the calf of the Israelites.

II Kings 17:9 "High places": places of worship, at first on hills and mountains, later on artificial mounds or platforms, under green trees, and in cities. Used for Israel's worship of Jehovah in the times of Samuel and David; then Solomon built platforms or chapels to Molech and Chemosh on a hill near Jerusalem. Jeroboam made high places for the golden calves in Bethel and Dan, and various other idolatrous high places were erected, which later were destroyed by Hezekiah and Josiah.

II Kings 17:17 "Divinations": The foretelling of secret things or things to come, by unlawful arts and practices. "Enchantment": to whisper or mutter after holding communication with serpents. Also, referring to a conjurer, that discovers hidden things by a superstitious use of words or ceremonies, by observation of water or smoke, etc.—*Pulpit Commentary; Matthew Poole's Commentary*.

Ezekiel 6:9 "Broken": Ruptured; crushed [heart].

LESSON BACKGROUND

The verses in Acts are from Stephen's speech before the high priests and rulers of the Jews. In his brief history of the Jews from Abraham's time to the time of the prophets, he accurately describes the progress of idolatry in the hearts of the children of Israel. Though they had just seen a great deliverance from Egypt and manifestation of God's power at Sinai, they immediately resisted God's commands

through Moses and, in their hearts, turned back to Egypt. They demanded a god they could see, when faced with a little space of waiting for Moses to come back from the mountain where they couldn't see or know what was happening to him.

We can determine from the account in Exodus what preceded this blatant turning away from God to idols. As soon as God had delivered them from Egypt, they murmured at the Red Sea and said they had been better off in Egypt. Three days after the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, they murmured again at the bitter waters of Marah. God answered Moses' cry for them and healed the waters. Again into the wilderness, and again into murmuring—this time it was longing for the meat and bread of Egypt. Again Moses cried to God and was answered by a supper of quail that night and the miraculous rain of bread the next morning, which continued every day, with the exception of Sabbath days, for forty years—tasty morsels of super-food containing all the nutrients a body needed for not just surviving, but thriving in the wilderness conditions.

The fourth murmuring was for water in the Rephidim area near Mount Horeb. This time God told Moses to strike the rock. As he did, out came gushing streams of water, enough for the more than a million people and their flocks and herds.

Ungratefulness > discontent > murmuring > impatience > bitterness > rebellion > idolatry; intrigue > secret attraction > seduction > open worship > immorality > child sacrifice > witchcraft: these became familiar patterns all down through the history of the Israelite nation.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Called Out*: What did Stephen call the sojourning Israelites?
2. *Turning Back*: How did Stephen describe the beginning backsliding of the Israelites?
3. *Self-Centered*: The rebellious Israelites rejoiced, not in the Lord but in ____?_____.
4. *What Else Could He Do?:* In response to their continual apostasy, God "turned and _____ _____ ____ . . ."

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Paul, in I Corinthians 10, lets us know that these events in Israel's history were written for our learning and admonition. What may we learn?

To guard our desires. Idolatry in our lives many times begins with legitimate desires. I just want to be thought well of. I just want to get married. I want an education and a good-paying job. I want to excel in my field.

To not be idolaters. Allowing our desires to control us causes us to bow at the altar of those desires. The foolish pursuit of financial gain, the drawing power of glamour or fashion, or the addiction of pornography—all are idols in the hearts of men and women.

To flee fornication. We fool ourselves by thinking we can hang on to idols in our hearts and keep from the downward moral slide that always results. How many times has this happened to individuals, who never intended to do something “that bad” but found themselves caught in the snare of the devil? Immorality led the Israelites even further into the sacrificing of their children. Consider the epidemic in our country of aborting unwanted babies. Deceptively called “a woman's right to choose,” abortion is a horrible step in the downward journey which began by unlawful desires, led to immorality, and then to murder.

To not tempt the Lord. In Exodus 17 the Israelites tempted the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” Doubting God's presence and questioning God are downward steps to idolatry put out there by the devil in his seduction process. Many people end up consulting with other means to find answers for their lives—fortune tellers and palm readers, horoscopes, meditation and yoga, psychiatrists, self-help gurus and motivational speakers.

To not murmur. We humans think we have a right to have things the way we want them. Complaining is the fleshly way to get something to change in our situation. It is a way to throw blame, punish someone, or manipulate others in order to make them look bad and make us look better. What is the idol here? Our own self-image, comfort and pleasure.

The modern idols of beauty, sensuality, fame, wealth, and selfish pleasure are leading men, women, boys and girls down the dark

pathway that ends in destruction.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The descent into idolatry was very quick. When Moses was gone just forty days the Israelites were ready for something new; something they could see. Having a mixed multitude along with them didn't help matters. This was a company of troublemakers, and they caused much damage to the people of God. The constant whining and complaining was very trying I'm sure.

It behooves us today to watch the company we keep. Notice in Numbers 11:1-6 the murmuring and ingratitude that was coming from the camp. They were bringing accusations against God, saying "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" When the spirit of a person or group begins to question the providence and goodness of God, and then begins to prescribe to Him how He should send them the necessary supplies and what kind it should be, know that something is wrong!

In verse forty-two of our lesson the sin of the people was so bad that "God turned." God gave up on them. Because of the spiritual adultery they were committing—murmuring complaining—it was too much, and God gave them up to work the works of the flesh to their own destruction.

Let this be a lesson for us today: Let us love God with all our heart, mind, and strength.

—Bro. James Bell

JANUARY 29, 2017

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON IDOLATRY

The Warning

Deuteronomy 4:25 When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger:

26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

27 And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you.

28 And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

The Fulfilment

II Chronicles 36:14 Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

15 And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

17 Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes: all these he brought to Babylon.

19 And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away unto Babylon; where they were servants to him and his servants until the reign of the kingdom of Persia.

MEMORY VERSE: Thus were they defiled with their own works,

and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.

—Psalm 106:39-41

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Lord specifically warned the children of Israel what would happen to them if they turned away from Him and served idols. When they refused to obey, all the curses that He had pronounced upon them came to pass, just as He had said.

WORD DEFINITIONS

II Chronicles 36:15 “Rising up betimes”: To start or rise early.

16 “No remedy”: No healing; no cure.

17 “The king of the Chaldees”: Nebuchadnezzar.

Psalm 106:39 “A whoring”: fornication; harlotry; prostitution. The turning away to idols was looked upon by God as spiritual adultery, as a woman being unfaithful to her beloved husband. Thus were Judah and Israel called harlots by God, as in Ezekiel 23; so also is the apostate church of Rome, in Revelations 17.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There are many Scriptures that tell the sad tale of Israel’s backsliding and its consequences. We have chosen a few to clearly express the point of this lesson. God’s Word is true. He promised, in detail, all the blessings that would have been poured out on His people if they would have kept His laws (Deuteronomy 28). Likewise, He detailed the curses that would be poured out if they turned away from Him (Deuteronomy 29). Israel experienced her golden days of blessing especially in the time of King David, when the nation served the Lord and reigned triumphant among the nations. Reading through the sad predictions of judgments, the warnings and pleadings time and time again by different prophets nearly breaks one’s heart. Then to see the tragic end to such a blessed nation! No wonder Jeremiah lamented, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow! How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!” (Lamentations 1:12 and 4:1).

I am touched to see how long God was merciful and longsuffering to Israel. He predicted judgment yet gave a space for his people to repent. He promised that if they did repent, He would hear their prayer, forgive them, and bring them back. Again, His Word was true. He did bring them back after seventy years.

Records show that after the Maccabean war, Israel, as a nation, never went into idolatry again, as far as worshipping the idols of the pagan world; however, when Jesus came, He rebuked them, strict observers of the religion of Jehovah that they were, for the idols in their hearts. Again, He gave them space to repent. Those who did were given a way to escape from the final destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 by the Romans. The ones who rejected God and the gift of His Son were destroyed and dispersed among the nations.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Judgment:* What did the Lord say would happen if Israel forsook Him, and how did it happen?
2. *Exile:* How long were they in captivity in Babylon?
3. *Relationship:* To what did God compare their idolatry?
4. *Restoration:* What was required of them for God to hear their prayer and bring them back into fellowship with Him?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There seems to be a definite pattern throughout history of God's people—created to be His own special treasure and enjoying fellowship with Him—for them to go astray after a time, lose the fervent worship and service to Him, and be drawn away to other gods, other loves and other attachments. Then reformation and revival breaks out and true worship emerges for a while, only to die down again; over and over the cycle has repeated itself.

After the apostasy of the early morning church, when the bright sun of pure religion was eclipsed by long years of man-rule and man-worship, the dark night was broken by the rays of reformation. The invention of the printing press made the Word of God available to the common man, and people began to believe and preach the

salvation message again. But the light was soon dimmed by the clouds and shadows of denominationalism, group-loyalty, man-made creeds and divisions.

Again God brought revival and reformation as people all over the world began to search for the true holiness and oneness of God's church revealed by the "evening" sun of God's light breaking through the clouds once more.

In the years that have followed, individuals, congregations and whole religious movements have risen and fallen, following the same pattern: Victory > lukewarmness > worldliness > apostasy. God's true religion, however, will never again be totally eclipsed. His truth will be preached until the end. The last days, Jesus said, would be like the time of Noah when the "sons of God" would be few, and unbelief and ungodliness would wax worse and worse. God's final judgment upon all idolatry will soon be poured out. Will you and I be among those, who, when Jesus comes, are found FAITHFUL?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The judgment of God is a concept that can be a little difficult to grasp. Love, mercy, and longsuffering are hallmarks of our Christian faith. Tolerance is the message of our world. Life goes by relatively calmly on a day-to-day basis. We are lulled into a belief, somewhat understandably so, that life will always continue thus.

A few years ago, a rain-wrapped, massive F5 tornado tore through the city streets of Joplin, Kansas. An "act of God" is what the insurance companies term such a storm. People were going about their normal daily activities. The sun rose that morning like every other morning, birds sang in the trees, babies were being born, children were playing, meals were being cooked and people were working at their places of employment. All of a sudden, however, life changed. Trees were uprooted and stripped bare. Homes and businesses were flattened, crushed, and mangled. Lives were lost. Complete and utter devastation were left in the wake of that storm.

A storm far greater, however, is on the horizon—the final judgment of God on sin and unrighteousness. Jesus told us that people would be going about their routine activities of daily living on

that day; they would be eating, drinking, marrying, and given in marriage. A day just like today. While people don't like to think about that final judgment day for very long, if at all, does it make it any less real? God is not slack concerning His promise.

We should ever be cognizant that the daily decisions we make are not without consequence. If worshipped, the gods of this world, whether they be blatantly sinful gods or "gray-area" gods will blind our eyes and lull us into sinful complacency which will ultimately lead to our own destruction, whether it be a price we pay here in this life, or on the final judgment day. God is yearningly, mercifully, and compassionately calling for a complete renunciation of them. Full obedience and adherence to His commandments is and will be our means of escape.

—Sis. Julie Elwell

FEBRUARY 5, 2017

THE BEGINNING AND DOWNWARD DECLINE OF IDOLATRY

Fullness

Deuteronomy 8:10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

Forgetfulness

Deuteronomy 8:11 Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.

Unlawful Desires

Psalm 106:13 They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:

14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.

15 And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

Ingratitude and Murmuring

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Psalm 106:24 Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word:

25 But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord.

Compromise

Psalm 106:34 They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them:

35 But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.

Idolatry, Immorality and Bloodshed

Psalm 106:36 And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

Romans 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Psalms 106:37 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,

38 And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

39 Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

MEMORY VERSE: Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.
—Hebrews 3:12

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures show the beginnings of idolatry, unbelief and evil in the heart. As it happened to the Old Testament church, we are warned that it can also happen to us.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 106:15 “Leanness”: A wasting disease; thinness.

24 “Despised”: abhor; cast away off; refuse.

25 “Murmured”: whisper; grumble; murmur rebelliously.

Romans 1:24 “Gave them up”: to hand over; to give or deliver over. To cease to restrain.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The first verse of our lesson is from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy where God is reminding the Israelites of their rough journey through the wilderness and how He had cared for them there, leading them to a land of plenty. He warns them to remember that it is He who gave them power to be productive and acquire wealth. Sad to say, they did forget Him when they got into Canaan and acquired houses, lands, vineyards and gardens.

In the 106th Psalm, the writer seems to be writing in the middle of the Babylonian captivity, recounting the events that brought them there. Paul, writing to the Romans, gives the account of all of fallen mankind in a similar pattern. In the second chapter of Romans, he goes on to chide the Jews for condemning the Gentiles for their godlessness when they had essentially done the same thing.

So idolatry is a human problem. Not just with the Israelites. Not just with the heathen. Whomever the people or nation, if God is not first in all our lives, guiding us and restraining us from evil, choosing to follow the depraved, foolish desires of our own hearts will drive us into idolatry, and deep immorality and violence.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Great Danger*: What is the spiritual danger of worldly prosperity or fullness?
2. *A Good Deterrent*: What is the importance of being thankful, praising, blessing and glorifying God?
3. *A Downward Course*: When we forget God, we fail to keep His _____, _____, and _____; we do not

wait for His _____.

4. *A Bad Influence*: When Israel did not destroy the heathen nations completely but mingled among them instead, what was the outcome?
5. *Turning Truth into a Lie*: Explain how people might do that.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

From our lesson today, we see that a thankful and contented heart does more than just lift us up. It's what keeps us from deteriorating into unbelief of God's love, care and intervention in our lives; it keeps us from being covetous and materialistic; it saves us from pining after the things in this world and from the corruption of its influence. Being grateful for God's way and keeping mindful that His way is best saves us from becoming mingled with the lower standards of the world and its immorality.

It's amazing how powerfully influencing the gods of this world are. People blindly follow ungodly leaders and icons, patterning their lives after what they put before them. If, for example, fashion dictates shameless vulgarity, then even "moral" people fall under that influence. If the fashion is ridiculous and ugly, people follow it, where if godly people suggest that modesty and simplicity is what should govern dress standards the feeling is, "Oh, my, I could never wear something so ugly!" What a double standard! What inconsistency! But that is how truth is changed into a lie by apostate religion. What people used to believe in and practice and love, they now call nonessential, fake, and legalistic. The ones who strive to please God are turned into "the bad guys," and those who are careless and loose celebrate being "loved with an unconditional love."

Beware of allowing an ungrateful, murmuring attitude to blind you into accepting the idols and polluted lifestyles of this world.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

People change the truth of God into a lie when they fail or cease to be totally honest with themselves and with God and to love and

worship Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. One who really loves God is earnest about understanding, knowing, and doing His will and worshipping Him in spirit and in truth. To such a one, the Spirit of God responds with enlightenment and revelation of truth. But to one who is interested in following his or her own desires and pleasures, the devil is ever ready to suggest a scripture (truth), but give it a slant that God never intended.

I heard of a woman who had a desire to steal. The devil helped her to find just the right scripture passage: "... all things are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21). Thus she changed the truth of God into a lie. Although this might be considered an extreme case, the enemy of truth is likewise deceiving multitudes of "religious" folk today by appealing to their minds with slanted or false interpretations of scripture. He even tried it with Jesus (see Matthew 4:6). But Jesus came back at the devil with "it is written again," and set the matter straight.

To the one whose heart is inclined to follow the fads and fashions of this world, the devil suggests, "There's nothing wrong with it, 'for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7)." But the one whose heart is really fixed on doing the will of God replies, "Get thee from me Satan, for it is written again, 'Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ'" (Colossians 2:8).

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name (character) of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). This is the sure way to avoid becoming snared in idolatry and the pollutions of this world. Take a good look at song #251 in the *Evening Light Songs* hymnal: "What Would Jesus Do?"

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

FEBRUARY 12, 2017

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ABOUT IDOLATRY

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe...they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

I Corinthians 10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

14 Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

21 Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

II Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

MEMORY VERSE: Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
—I John 5:21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The apostles admonished the believers—

the strict Jewish Christians, but especially the Gentiles who, having been brought up in Greek and Roman paganism, were now seeking to serve and know the true God—to keep from being defiled by idolatry and devil worship and its accompanying feasts and sacrifices. They warned against false teachers and leaders of heresy.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 17:22 “Superstitious”: having a religious (superstitious) fear driven by a confused concept of God—producing “sincere” but very misdirected religion. Indeed, this is the mark of heathenism.

—*HELPS Word Studies*.

Acts 17:30 “God winked at”: Overlooked; did not come forth to punish, as in Acts 14:16: “Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.”

Acts 21:25 “Things strangled”: animals or birds that had been killed without shedding their blood, which implied eating the blood, which was also strictly forbidden to the Jews. The reason the Gentile believers were also restricted was because it was used in the feasts and compacts of idolaters. The blood contained the life, a deeper reason as to why the eating of it had been prohibited by God.

I Corinthians 10:7 “Rose up to play”: Hilarity, laughter, singing, and indecent dancing (Moses found the people were naked).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The book of Acts records the ways in which the New Testament church of God conquered the dragon, paganism, and cast him out of the “heaven” or the high places of worship, in men’s hearts. In the example we have in our lesson, Paul, after observing the many religious rites and shrines at Athens, explained that the making of gold and silver images in an effort to worship God was part of the ignorance of the past. Understanding had now come with the teachings of the Gospel, and God was calling mankind to repent of idolatry and turn to the true and living God.

A huge thing in the New Testament church was the settling of the questions about the Gentile idol worship with its feasts and sacrifices, and the scruples of the Jews concerning the eating of meat

that might possibly have come from those sacrifices. The discussion seems to stem from the way an animal sacrifice was divided up. The blood was poured out in sacrifice to the idol; a second part was dressed and eaten by the sacrificer, and another part was sold in the market indiscriminately, along with other animals which had not been sacrificed but killed for common use. Devout Jews, knowing that the flesh hanging in the market bazaar could have been dedicated to an idol, scrupulously abhorred and avoided it. Jews who had been converted to Christianity were just as careful. But the believing Gentiles, having turned from sacrificing and feasting in idol worship and realizing that the idols weren't real, but just myths and imaginary fables, had no qualms about buying the marketplace meat. They felt that their intention was no longer to partake of idolatry, so the meat was no longer of "sacred" quality to them.

Partaking of the sacrificed meat—either buying it with that knowledge or sitting down to feast in the idol temple—was absolutely forbidden by Paul and the other disciples. That was equivalent to communing—having fellowship—with devils, or demons. A strict commandment, however, was not given concerning the meat in the market that wasn't clearly marked. Personal liberty was allowed; however, charity toward all believers, scrupulous Jews, Christian Jews and converted heathens alike, trumped all allowances or prohibitions of "law"; a Christian should allow himself no liberty when he knew it brought offence to his brother.

The two underlying guidelines, then, are: (1) do everything to the glory of God and (2) do all for love of the brethren. These are sufficient rules to "regulate every man's conscience and practice in all indifferent things, where there are no express command or prohibitions" (Adam Clarke).

In no way did the New Testament Christians give allowances to any form of idolatry. The warnings and commands come from Jesus, Paul, James, John, and the other disciples. They dealt also with the worship of angels, gluttony as a form of idolatry, covetousness and worldliness. As was mentioned in an earlier lesson, Paul portrayed the beginning factors and end results of idol worship in the first chapter of Romans. The book of Revelation goes even deeper into admonitions against the different forms of apostasy and idolatry. So we see that a prevailing theme of all Scripture is to flee idolatry and

worship the true God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Enlightenment*: How did Paul reason with the Athenians concerning the nature of the true God, and what were they now to do?
2. *Clarity*: The Gentile believers weren't made to observe all of Moses' law. What were the four prohibitions placed upon them by the apostles?
3. *Purity*: What kinds of wickedness always accompanied the worship of idols, and how did the apostles address this in Scripture?
4. *Awareness*: Feasting at the table with the idolaters was really sharing communion with _____.
5. *Guidance*: What two concepts should regulate everything we do?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Originally, just for our education, I was going to list the gods/goddesses from the ancient Canaanite/Phoenician religions and their counterparts in the Greek and Roman religions. What I found was astounding—and sickening. There are literally hundreds of gods and goddesses. What they represented and their worship rites and practices boggle the mind. Their stories are a conglomeration of complicated details of immoral relationships, violence, fear and horror, which was reflected in the entire culture.

Here is a short description of Rome at the time of Jesus' birth: "It has been rightly said, that the idea of conscience, as we understand it, was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited, if possible, even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practiced, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description." —*Edersheim*

Rather than find out all about the gods that produced such a culture, I decided it would be far more edifying to study God’s Word to find out how He wants us to worship and live. Let it suffice to say that the early Church went forth conquering and to conquer ALL the false gods. However, within a few hundred years a *mixture* of the elements of paganism and Christianity began to take place. The Roman Catholic church established its own system of idolatry. Later the Protestant reformation took place, but the “daughters” of the “mother church” were just like her in that the worship of creeds, formal rituals, the leadership of men, pride and worldliness characterized their systems.

Whatever the form, we still need to beware of the “mixture.” This is what was dangerous to the Israelites, this is what composed the Apostasy, and this is what we have to deal with today. Let us seek for that true, *pure* religion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

According to I Corinthians 10:20, Satan is behind idolatry. It is an attempt to lure man's interest, attention, affection, and devotion from the true God. An idol can be anything that comes between us and our relationship with God.

In my teenage years, sports was one of my idols. I loved it, I watched it, I practiced it and played it. I looked to it for happiness and satisfaction. It consumed me as I sacrificed body and time. Sports is a big idol in our nation today along with Hollywood, money, fame, music and false religion.

Things that are innocent can also become an idol, if gradually, over time, I give them too much time, money, and energy, and neglect my relationship with God. People may not literally bow down before an idol, but bowing in the heart is just the same.

Lord, help us to live carefully and to set our affections on things above.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

FEBRUARY 19, 2017

IDOLS OF THE HEART

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Luke 12:15 Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. (Also Psalm 62:10 and I Timothy 6:9-10.)

Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Ezekiel 33:31 And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Hosea 4:11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

Philippians 3:18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Also Romans 16:18).

II Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy...

4 ...heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

I John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the

world.

MEMORY VERSE: Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. —Jeremiah 17:5, 7

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God’s Word warns us to cleanse our hearts of anything that might become an idol to us or anything that takes away our love, trust or service from Him: financial prosperity; pleasures of this world; food, drink or any other fleshly lusts; pride, fame, or honor.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 6:24 “Mammon”: riches, money, possessions, property.

Luke 12:15 “Covetousness”: Avarice (an inordinate desire of gaining and possessing wealth; covetousness; greediness or insatiable desire of gain. —*Webster’s Dictionary 1828*); aggression; desire for advantage. “Covetousness is the desire for more (things), i.e. lusting for a greater number of temporal things that go beyond what God determines is eternally best (beyond His preferred will).” —*HELPS Word Studies*

Colossians 3:5 “Fornication”: The Greek word is *porneía* (the root of the English terms "pornography, pornographic"). Another form is *pornos*, which is derived from *pernaō*, “to sell off”; properly, a selling off (surrendering) of sexual purity; promiscuity of any type. —*HELPS Word Studies*. “Uncleanness”: Impurity. —*Strong’s Concordance*. “Inordinate affection”: lust; a feeling which the mind suffers; an affection of the mind; emotion, passion; passionate desire; used by the Greeks in either a good or a bad sense.—*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*. “Evil concupiscence”: Evil (inner evil; *inwardly foul*, rotten, wicked) desire, eagerness for, inordinate desire, lust. Passion built on strong feelings (urges). —*HELPS Word Studies*. “Idolatry”: worship or service of an image; worship of false gods.

Ezekiel 33:31 “Covetousness”: gain made by violence, unjust gain, profit.

Philippians 3:19 “Whose god is their belly”: Those who worship their own appetites; or who live not to adore and honor God, but for self-indulgence and sensual gratifications. —*Barnes Notes on the Bible*.

Jeremiah 5:17 “Maketh flesh his arm”: puts confidence in, or leans upon, for support or protection, mere mortal, feeble, sinful man, as the Israelites did when they made alliances with Egypt and Assyria.

LESSON BACKGROUND

“...Covetousness is a sin, which, above others, a Christian should set himself against, and endeavour to mortify and subdue, it having a sort of idolatry in it, drawing our love, our trust, our fear, our joy, from God, and placing the supremacy of our affections in and upon the creatures. True, the covetous man does not believe his money to be God; but by his inordinate loving of it and trusting in it, he is as truly guilty of idolatry, as if he bowed his knee unto it: for God more regards the internal acts of the mind than he doth the external acts of the body. In like manner, the Papists do not believe their saints and angels to be gods; but by praying to them, and trusting in them for relief and help, they give them the inward worship of the soul, and consequently they are as guilty of idolatry as if they did believe them to be God.” —William Burkitt, *Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament*.

Jesus didn't say much about idolatry, as His teachings were primarily to the Jews who strictly worshiped Jehovah. He did, however, speak much about covetousness. No doubt He was sadly observing His own disciple bowing at the feet of this idol. Money or gain, He said, was a master. You serve it.

Paul warned Timothy that the love of gain was the root of all evil. He told the Colossians that covetousness is idolatry and just as evil as fornication and uncleanness.

The warning God gave Ezekiel was that the people would come to hear him speak and with their mouths show worship and praise, but all the while their hearts would be going after and thinking about their schemes to get riches.

Likewise, a man's appetites draw his heart away from God. Many

would serve their own desires for strong drink, food and sensual pleasure, proving who or what their “god” really was. Such, Paul said, were enemies of the cross of Christ. The idea was also used by James, who called such enmity “adultery.”

What strong, emphatic terms are used in these scriptures! “Enemies.” “Adulterers.” “Root of all evil.” “Cursed.” “Hate.” “Despise.” “The love of the Father is not in him.” Professing Christians don’t want to think that they are enemies or adulterers. They don’t want to admit that the love of the Father is not in them. But the words are as strong as the displeasure of the Lord God is. He is still the jealous God of the Israelites and He is worthy of all our love, all our trust, all our service.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Strong Language*: What terms did Jesus and Paul use when describing covetousness, and what did Paul say to do with covetousness?
2. *Strong Influence*: What are the things that take away the heart from God?
3. *Moment of Truth*: What is a person called whose god is his belly?
4. *Idols of the Heart*: Name those listed in II Timothy 3.
5. *Loving the World*: What is a person called who does this?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

What are the characteristics of a heart idol? First of all, *you serve it*. It makes demands of you. It controls you. Most importantly, it causes you to sin against God. By that definition, drug addiction is a form of idolatry, as is pornography, or any addiction, for that matter.

Secondly, *you love it*. You express affection for it. It is dear to you. It makes you feel happy. You prefer it to anything else and make room for it to the exclusion of other important things. You talk about it, post about it on social media, and celebrate it. People do this with alcohol, food, coffee, chocolate, sports, their job, their church, their lover—and the list goes on.

A third thing that characterizes idolatry in the heart is *trust*. It’s

what you depend on, lean on and put all your hopes upon; what you go to in distress, what comforts you, and what makes you feel secure, even sometimes to the point of feeling like it's what insures you of making it to heaven. Many people put other things or people in the place which should be reserved for God alone: a preacher, teacher or author; a "saint", crucifix, cross necklace, or other charm; a devotional book or blog they "follow"; their medication, retirement plan, or bank account; a doctor, political leader or celebrity.

The idol that is most treacherous; the one most disguised as something good; has to do with religion. We can come to trust in our own efforts, our own righteousness, our own set of beliefs. Because we go to "the right church" or because we follow all the right teachings, we think we are saved, or will go to heaven when we die.

God alone deserves this place in our lives. Although obedience and living right is required, it's by Jesus' blood applied to our hearts and by God's mercy and grace that we shall be saved. Let us love HIM, serve HIM, Trust HIM.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Growing up, I had several neighbors who were Catholic. They would go to mass and perform the duties that were required of them. They recited the rosary, prayed to Mary and other saints and confessed to the priest. Yet, by their own admission, they had no true knowledge of God nor a true understanding that their worship was idolatrous.

Our house was a magnet for neighborhood children. It was the place to congregate and play and it created many opportunities for mother to give godly instruction and advice. Oftentimes when our friends would come over my mother would be sitting in her chair reading the Bible. This was a common practice to us children and we never thought much of it. Many years later one of our neighborhood friends told us that she had always wondered: "When is your mother ever going to finish reading that book? She's been reading it for years."

What she hadn't realized is that "book" was more than just a book. It was the heartbeat of my mother's life. It was the central theme of our family life, the guidebook that directed the decisions of

our lives. It was priority.

That “book” opened our understanding of God and gave us a glimpse of His great love for us and what He required in our worship of Him. It’s very simple: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” No Pope, no priest, no person, no thing. He alone must sit on the throne of our hearts.

As was the case with my Catholic neighbor, idol worship can be the result of ignorance or lack of knowledge. But as was the case with my mother, the true worship of God was and always will be very deliberate. It is the choice we make to put God first and to keep him there. It is our deliberate choice to fend off anything and everything that would compete for our affection and attempt to dethrone God from the preeminent place in our hearts.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

FEBRUARY 26, 2017

IN LOWLINESS: WORSHIP MUST BE HUMBLE

Psalm 95:6 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

Psalm 99:5 Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool: for he is holy.

Leviticus 10:3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

Isaiah 42:8 I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Luke 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much

as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

MEMORY VERSE: Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off. —Psalm 138:6

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures give us principles of the right attitudes of worship: bowing, kneeling, glorifying God alone, humbling ourselves, being aware of our needs and seeking His mercy, and having an attitude of reverence and godly fear.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 95:6 “Kneel”: to bless; adore with bended knees. It is the same word as “I will bless the Lord” in Psalm 16:7 and other passages.

Leviticus 10:3 “Sanctified”: to be set apart or consecrated. We “sanctify” the Lord when we set Him up on high and apart from everyone and everything else and “consecrate” Him to have first place. “Glorified”: from a root meaning *heavy*; weighty. In a good sense, this means honourable, abounding, rich.

Isaiah 42:8 “My glory”: the honor due to Me (Jehovah).

Luke 18:14 “Justified”: to show to be or declare righteous. “Exalteth”: elevate; lift or raise up. “Abased”: to make low; humiliate.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson begins today with the call to worship; to bow down in humility because He is holy, and to kneel to bless and adore Him because He is worthy; to lift Him up as Lord in our hearts and in our lives. This is a psalm of David, as confirmed in Hebrews 4:7. The ninety-ninth is also supposed to be written by David.

The verse from Leviticus comes from the tragic story of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s two sons, who offered strange fire upon the

golden altar and were immediately devoured by fire from the Lord. Some suppose they were under the influence of wine, or that they were lifted up in pride because of their office. However that may be, their offense was aggravated: they took common fire instead of fire from the altar; they went together into a place where only one was allowed; they offered it at a time which was not appropriate; and they were unauthorized to perform the incense service. They ventured carelessly and presumptuously into the place where only the high priest could go. Moses' stern command to Aaron forbade grief or bitterness because of their death, establishing a precedent for Israel that the worship of the most holy God was utterly sacred and must not be defiled by pride, presumption, carelessness, or any "human" element.

God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, reiterates the concept of honor, reverence, and glory to be given only to God.

The story Jesus told about the two men praying in the temple shows us what God will bless and justify in worship. Only the heart that is humble and senses its need of God and His redemption will receive His approval.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Consuming Fire*: What brought about the swift judgment fire upon Nadab and Abihu?
2. *Of No Avail*: Can we hope for blessing and approval from God if we are arrogant and self righteous? (But I am doing everything right! Isn't that important?)
3. *Near or Afar Off*: Which treatment do we want from God, and how can we approach Him to gain His nearness?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Someone has said that pride is the chief vice which tempts the most righteous. If that is indeed true, then professors of holiness have a responsibility to guard against all arrogance or presumption, especially as we worship. Beware of looking down on others nearby who may have glaring spiritual needs. We may not be aware of our

own needs, which are just as glaring in God's eyes. We must ever resist the temptation to glory in our spiritual progress, to think that we have special privileges, or that we are beyond having boundaries or limitations. This is obviously what made Aaron's sons so reckless and headstrong.

Every aspect of a worship service must be bathed in humility and a strong sense of our need of God. "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down." Let there be no glory in man or man's abilities. A worship service is not a talent show. It is not a place to applaud one another or stroke egos. Although we show honor to the aged, seniority doesn't always designate who is used of the Lord to minister. We are all just empty vessels; we are all just brethren on the same level. And we're all here to bring glory to God.

Reverence toward God and a lowly estimation of ourselves in regard to our brother—these are vital ingredients in worship.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In Matthew Henry's *Study Bible* it speaks concerning Psalm 138:6 of the "favor God bears to this humble people. He smiles upon them as well-pleased with them, and sooner or later, He will put honor upon them, while He knows the proud afar off; knows them, but disowns them." In Matthew 7:21-24 where it refers to the end of time, there were people who were saying, "Lord, Lord," as if surely He should know them. But He said, "I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity."

Our world has strayed so far from God with entertainment and noise, the Spirit of God has long departed. It reminds me of I Kings 18:21-38, when Elijah and the 450 false prophets of Baal had a showdown. The false prophets made so much noise and emotion they tore the place apart trying to get their god's attention. But Elijah quietly put things back together, humbly knelt down and prayed, and the real fire fell from heaven, convincing the people whose God was really God.

True worship to God honors Christ in the same humble way today. We have nothing to be ashamed of when we worship God in spirit and in truth. In "Humble Thyself to Walk With God" (# 298 in

the *Evening Light Songs*), the first verse reads,

“If thou wouldst have the dear Savior from heaven
Walk by thy side from the morn ‘till the even,
There is a rule that each day you must follow;
Humble thyself to walk with God.”

Let us not be ashamed by our humble way of worship to God, in kneeling before Him when we pray and lifting Him up in our singing with heartfelt praise. Our God loves to be honored.

—Bro. James Bell

MARCH 5, 2017

IN SINCERITY AND TRUTH: WORSHIP MUST BE HONEST

Joshua 24:14 Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

Psalm 51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 145:18 The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

Proverbs 26:23 Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.

Matthew 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

John 4:23 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.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

MEMORY VERSE: My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. —I John 3:18

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The worship that is pleasing to the Lord

and which brings Him near to the worshipper is that done in honesty and sincerity and in accordance with revealed truth. Vain worship is that which is done in word only, but not with the whole heart.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Joshua 24:14 “Sincerity”: without defect; blameless; complete; with integrity; entirely in accord with truth and fact. “In truth”: firmness; faithfulness; reliableness.

Proverbs 26:23 “Burning lips”: The *American Standard Version* reads, “Fervent lips and a wicked heart are like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

Joshua was now one hundred and ten years old. Just before he died, he gathered Israel’s leaders together and reminded them of what God had commanded them. He gave them these most important commands: serve the Lord in sincerity and truth and put away false gods. The people made a covenant that day which Joshua recorded, and set up a memorial of stone under the oak tree.

Did the people keep their covenant? As soon as Joshua’s generation was gone, they “turned quickly out of the way”. Their sordid record during the time of the judges proves just how terrible the curses God placed on their idolatry could be.

At last God raised up a leader who was after His own heart who united Israel once again under the worship of the true God. The land was filled with peace and prosperity. David, extolling the greatness of the Lord in Psalm 145, describes how such a mighty God is not far off but near to them who call upon Him in TRUTH! In the Psalm 52 confession of his great sin, he acknowledged that God desires truth in the secret, inward part of man.

In the passage from Proverbs, one can just “see” a piece of common pottery covered with cheap silver paint sitting next to a piece of genuine silver, polished to a bright sheen. It reminds me of a piano I once had, that I called “The Hypocrite.” It was beautiful on the outside—gracefully curving Queen Anne legs and ornate music stand—but its sound made you shudder. Playing it was almost

painful to one who really loved good music. This is how I believe God feels when someone prays or praises with a deceitful, wicked heart.

Jesus pointedly told the Pharisees that's what they were doing. They had established a most awful tradition and taught it as God's law when it was actually breaking God's commandment! "Your worship is vain," He said, quoting from Isaiah 29:13, "Because you honor me with only your lips." What God wants is our heart—our whole heart.

Jesus, as He talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, shared that God was seeking for worshippers to worship Him in spirit—inwardly with their whole heart—and in truth—in accordance with Divinely revealed knowledge and truth.

When the apostle John talked to the early church about giving, which is a part of our worship, he said, "It's not with your heart unless your deeds match what your mouth says."

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Last Message*: How did Joshua tell the Israelites to serve the Lord?
2. *A God Who is Near*: What kind of worship brings us close to God?
3. *A Word Picture*: What is this passage portraying? (Proverbs 26:23)
4. *Look it Up*: What commandment were the Pharisees breaking by their tradition? What was at the heart of this wicked tradition?
5. *In Truth*: Is it enough to just be sincere? Are there requirements for true worship? What does God really desire in our inward parts?
6. *It's Just Words*: How are "fervent lips and a cold, wicked heart" explained in the passage in I John 3?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We have seen in earlier lessons where the Israelites promised time and time again that they would worship the Lord, but then quickly backslid into idolatry and gross wickedness. God longed for a

people who would not just pay Him lip service, but have a daily life that blessed and praised and honored Him!

If I say “Praise the Lord” in the worship service and lift my hands in an “Amen, this song is true” gesture, do I carry it out at home? When the box of pins drops all over the rug or the toddler comes in out of the mud onto a freshly mopped floor, what comes out of my mouth? It’s truly a sacrifice to offer up thanksgiving at a time like that, right?

It’s easy to say, “I love you, Lord” when my loved ones are alive and safe, but what if I have said “Good bye” for the last time? Oh, it means so much when in my heart I cherish the Lord and draw near to Him as the tears are falling!

Turn the small acts of every day into worship. Seek Him for the ability and strength to do the littlest task. Praise Him out loud for every good gift. Thank Him in the middle of every difficulty. Obey every small whisper He gives you. Trust Him constantly in the heat of temptation to keep you from sinning against Him. And when it’s time to meet together with His people for worship, yearn after His presence, sing with all your might, praise Him with your voice, and yield to His dealings with fervency of spirit.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

My Dad’s voice yet echoes through the years with these remembered words of my youth: “Just be yourself, Julie. You don’t have to try to be like anybody else, just be yourself.”

We get good at hiding sometimes, though. Because we don’t always want other people to see or know what is going on inside of us, we turn our lips up in a practiced smile and put on our metaphorical sunglasses. While we are not obligated to show the world every single thought and emotion inside of us, God is different. He yearns for such a close relationship with us that He wants us to keep it real with Him.

How do we, in a practical way then, stay real with God? Bro. Clifford Wilson once spoke these words: “Never be afraid to tell God anything. At all.” It can be kind of intimidating or humbling, however, to tell a Holy God the ugliness of an attitude we are fighting,

confessing an uncomely temptation, or admitting we have utterly failed in some way. At times, it is easier to self-justify, ignore, brush over, or hide from these things, all the while maintaining our profession of faith.

The other morning, Satan seemed to rise right up with me to start the day and waged war against me. The more I thought about a certain situation the more disquieted I felt. I drove over to a lake where I walk often. As I walked, I began pouring out the “not so beautiful” emotions raging in my heart. Once again, God amazed me. Rather than feeling condemnation, I felt a peace and quietness flow over me and Satan had to leave. When Wednesday night came around, I didn’t have to pay trite lip service or pray an uninspired prayer. Why? Because God had met me at the altar of honesty and my worship was given with genuine thankfulness.

—Sis. Julie Elwell

MARCH 12, 2017

IN SPIRIT AND IN HOLINESS: WORSHIP MUST BE HEAVENLY AND HOLY

John 4:24 God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Acts 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

I Corinthians 14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with understanding also.

Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

I Chronicles 16:29 Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in

the beauty of holiness.

Psalm 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Psalm 119:7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

Psalm 99:9 Exalt the Lord God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy.

Ezekiel 43:12 This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

MEMORY VERSE: Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

—Revelation 15:4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The worship of God—praise, exalting, singing—Who is a spirit, must be with our spirit, or inner man, which is our connection to God. He is not worshipped with what we do or bring with our hands, nor is He limited to any building or geographical location. Additionally, because He is holy, we must worship Him in holiness and with pure lives.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 4:24 “In spirit”: “Inwardly in our minds and hearts, adoring his majesty, revering his power, humbled before his purity, confiding in his mercy, praising him for his benefits, loving him for his unspeakable love to us; being subject to his sway, obedient to his will, resigned under his dispensations, devoted to his glory, and aspiring after a closer union with Him, and a more full conformity to Him.” —*Benson Commentary*

Acts 17:25 “Worshipped with men’s hands”: to “serve”; to wait upon; to render religious service or homage. The heathen practice of bringing food and nourishment to their gods, and believing that it was consumed by them is referred to here.

Ephesians 5:19 “Psalms”: A striking of musical strings; the phrase is used of one who has it in his heart to sing or recite a song

of the sort. “Hymns”: A song that gives honor, praise of thanksgiving to God. “Spiritual songs”: songs that are divinely inspired, and so evocative of the Holy Spirit. “[Songs that are] indited [composed] by the Spirit of God, consist of spiritual matter, and are designed for spiritual edification; and are opposed to all profane, loose, and wanton songs.”—*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*

Psalm 66:18 “If I regard iniquity in my heart”: look with favor or pleasure upon any sin whatsoever, especially idolatry, which is often expressed by the word *iniquity*. “...If I have not been willing to forsake all sin; if I have cherished a purpose of pollution or wrong.”
—*Barnes Notes on the Bible*

LESSON BACKGROUND

As was mentioned in earlier lessons, Jesus’ message to the woman at the well, who was a Samaritan, settled some deep ancient confusion and pollution in the minds of Jews and Samaritans concerning the worship of Jehovah. Jesus brought light and truth upon the subject, elevating it to an entirely new level, and revealing that anyone in the world, anywhere in the world, is called to worship the Father with a sincere, pure and true motive of heart; not with lip service or literal rituals, but with His spirit. This could mean the native in the jungle, the prisoner in his cell, the island dweller, the tribesman on the Sahara, the businessman in his office, or the mother as she holds her baby. It could mean driving down the road, gathered with other saints in a chapel, or lying bedfast in the grips of paralysis. True worship takes place in the spirit—from our innermost being, directed to, enabled by, and united with the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul brought it out more clearly when he addressed the Athenians about the worship of the true God. Echoing a similar passage in Psalms 50:8-14, he explained that their practice of bringing food to the gods, or going through other rituals to “sustain” their gods was not beneficial or necessary for the true God, Who is self-sufficient, whole and complete.

In his epistles to the churches, Paul also taught the importance of spiritual worship, again emphasizing that true worship takes place in the inward part of man, the spirit; therefore worship must be on a

spiritual, or heavenly level, not on a temporal or physical level. The songs and prayers must follow this pattern. Historical writings reveal that the early church refrained from using musical instruments in worship (as had the Jews who had returned from captivity, and were zealous to not return to the defiling elements of Canaanite idolatrous worship), in their desire to please the Lord with spiritual, not fleshly, worship.

The remaining scriptures in our lesson bring out the important truth, holiness unto the Lord, as being the “law” of His house, or the prescription for acceptable worship. His house today is His church, the body of believers, where He comes to dwell, individually in our hearts, and corporately in the assembly of saints.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *His Dwelling Place:* Where does God want to dwell, and where does He require men to worship?
2. *A Necessary Component:* God wants us to worship with our _____ and be filled with His _____.
3. *What to Bring:* What is always a vital part of worship?
4. *Two Opposites:* God won’t hear the prayer of a heart that _____, but is pleased when worshipped with _____ of _____ from someone who has learned His righteous _____.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

This is a concept that I see developing as we have studied this subject: God doesn’t need my worship to make Him great or complete. Rather, worship is for my benefit. *I* need to recognize my need for Him and humble my heart before him in reverence and contrition. *I* need to acknowledge His gifts and blessing in thanksgiving and praise. *I* need to trust in Him implicitly to provide, lead, guide, and care for me.

The Bible speaks of divine jealousy. It’s a jealous love for *me*—I suffer, I lack, I will go into destruction if I turn aside from Him, and He ardently wants what’s best for me and what will bring me into eternal bliss and fellowship with Him, for which purpose He created

me.

Two important aspects of this are brought out in this lesson. He created me with a spirit, through which He gives inspiration. Although I use my physical voice in praise, petition, and song, it must originate deep in my spirit or it is dead and empty. Likewise, if I offer worship while cherishing idolatry or any sin in my life, it is lifeless. The Old Testament Israelites attempted to worship God in this way. He called it a stench, an abhorrence, to his nostrils, and refused to attend to it, countenance it, or bless it in any way (Isaiah 1:10-20 and Amos 5:21-24).

When we have learned His righteous judgments through His Spirit Who makes them manifest—clearly known and revealed—to us, we can then understand how to worship God in spirit and in the beauty of His holiness.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Colossians 2:23 speaks of “will worship.” Will worship involves the will, the desires, the personal likings, or the whims of the worshiper. It is “self-devised” worship. The offerings of Nadab and Abihu, as recorded in Leviticus 10:1, were a form of will worship. Cain’s sacrifice (Genesis 4:3-5) was also a form of will worship. He offered it according to his own personal liking, and it involved that which meant the most to him—the product of his own toil and the work of his own hands. Will worship can never produce a sacrifice acceptable to God.

There are many different forms of “will worship.” Any self-motivated style of worship wherein the worshiper seeks fulfillment of certain emotional, sensational, or intellectual cravings is will worship. Will worship can manifest itself in different ways, depending upon the temperament of the worshiper. Our temperament is our “inclination or mode of emotional response—disposition.” In will worship it is often the temperament that regulates the will and the will becomes the regulating factor of one’s worship. Will worship can take place when the temperament of a person is such as to cause him or her to crave the achievement of certain sensations of ecstasy or to experience certain intellectual

delights. Listening to, producing, or participating in certain styles of music, listening to a demonstrative, piquant orator, etc., can achieve these sensations and delights. In Acts 12:21-22 we read of Herod giving an oration that so inspired the people that they “gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” These kinds of motivations, however, come from the human element rather than the divine.

God cannot be worshiped on the basis of any kind of human temperament. Human temperament may, and does, become involved in worship when touched by the Spirit of God, but the essence of all true worship lays within the element of God’s own Spirit and His truth. Humanity cannot worship God aright without the aid and moderation of His Spirit and the light of His truth. We must worship within the element of who God is, not who we are. Nothing but God Himself and the very essence of His own person can truly sate the cravings of the human heart.

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

MARCH 19, 2017

IN UNITY AND FORGIVENESS: WORSHIP MUST BE HARMONIOUS

Isaiah 58:2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of

wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Matthew 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Mark 11:25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

II Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

MEMORY VERSE: For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. —I Corinthians 14:33

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God is worshipped, not only by us as individuals, but also in the assembly of saved, called out, and holy people. He desires right relationships between worshippers; forgiveness, unity, peace and harmony. If these things are not in order, God rejects the worship as hypocritical.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 58:3 “In the day of your fast ye find pleasure and exact all your labours”: ‘In the day of your fasting you indulge your lusts, and draw near to all your idols.’ *Syriac version*. Or, some give the meaning, “Ye carry on your business and oppress all your labourers.”

6 “Let the oppressed go free”: “Jerome renders it, ‘Free those who are broken.’ *The Septuagint* [says], ‘Set at liberty those who are broken down.’” —*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. “How can any nation pretend to fast or worship God at all, or dare to profess that they believe in the existence of such a Being, while they carry on the slave trade, and traffic in the souls, blood, and bodies, of men! O ye most flagitious of knaves, and worst of hypocrites, cast off at once the mask of religion; and deepen not your endless perdition by professing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, while ye continue in this traffic!” —*Adam Clarke*

Matthew 5:23 “Gift”: a present, specifically a sacrifice. “Ought”: a certain thing.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Some commentators feel the prophet Isaiah is speaking to the Jews who, in his time and again in the time of our Lord, were more zealous for externals than for inward holiness. Another thinks this refers to the Jews in captivity who were trying to gain God's favor and a release; and that hence, sacrifices are not mentioned, but only fasting and Sabbath observance, which they could keep though far away from the temple in Jerusalem. However it may be, the people seemed to think they could bring God under obligation to save them, and lay claim to His favor.

In the New Testament, Jesus again dealt with hypocritical religion that concerned itself with externals, while ignoring the sins of pride, arrogance, and condemnation of others. In the Sermon on the Mount, He gave many examples of how God's law was not just “letter only” but to be written upon the heart as a deeper guide for every attitude and action. He spoke much about being merciful and generous toward others and humble and meek in attitude. The verses in our lesson specifically deal with what's going on in our relationship with others and how it affects our worship, service and offering we are giving God.

Paul instructed the church at Corinth much about public worship assemblies. Our memory verse seems to be the “bottom line” of all his instruction about worship, prophecy, speaking other languages and the operation and manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit: God is the author of peace, and not confusion, within His church and in our individual hearts. Follow charity and peace, he taught Timothy, with those saints who are calling upon the Lord—worshipping—with pure hearts. In other passages, Paul deals with the order of things—man being in subjection to Christ, his wife being in subjection to him and wearing the symbolic covering of that subjection, her long hair—as being very much connected to acceptable public or private worship (praying or prophesying). Peter wrote concerning a man's behavior toward his wife, and how it had bearing upon the way his prayer (worship) to God was received.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the concept of human relationships affecting a person's worship to God is very clearly taught.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Good Appearances:* Name the things the Jews were doing that made it seem like they wanted to truly worship God.
2. *At the Heart of Things:* What was the real reason revealed by God for their fast? Are there modern-day examples of this?
3. *True Fasting:* What are the characteristics of the fast the Lord has chosen?
4. *First Things First:* What must precede an offering to the Lord?
5. *When You Pray:* What must we also do if we are holding a grudge?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Pure religion clearly has two parts: worship to God and love for one's neighbor. This is repeated many times in Moses' law, called the "two greatest commandments" by Jesus Himself, and taught and practiced by the early church.

James pointed out the inconsistency of speaking evil to one another with the same tongue with which we worship and bless God. A man's religion is vain if he cannot not bridle his tongue.

John emphasized loving others as a proof that one is living in God's light and loving Him. We must not only say we love our brothers, but do the deeds of charity for their needs.

There was an instance in my younger years where I really failed of the grace of God and acted in impatience and haste, injuring someone. The loved ones of this person were very offended at me, and although I had tried to apologize, it was not received, and I faced the weekend—Sunday services—knowing that they had "ought" against me.

I knew what I had to do. Early Sunday morning I made another call. This time my heart was sincerely contrite, and in tears I humbled myself, acknowledged my failure and pled for forgiveness. I went to

service somewhat hopeful, but still not secure in the knowledge that they had forgiven me. How could I worship with this awful cloud between us? But oh, thank the Lord, when we met at the chapel, we fell in each other's arms, and tears were flowing from us both. What a clear heart I had then to sing, pray, and worship the Lord! That experience has influenced me all the rest of my life. The Lord personally applied the TRUTH of these Scriptures!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The apostle John taught in I John 3:18, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." Again in I John 2:9, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." One might testify to know God yet will not speak to a brother or family member. This is not true worship, and John said this was impossible. Our earthly relationships are a reflection of what is in the heart. If I cannot love my brother, whom I can see, how can I love God, whom I cannot see?

Sad to say, this condition is prevalent in our world today, where because of hurts and offences, many people have closed their hearts and minds. There are family members who haven't spoken to certain family members for years. Jesus knows that hurts and offences are real and can be very severe. He also gives us space or time to get our bearings when they have occurred. Yet we still have a decision and a choice of what route we will take. If we choose to hold on to the hurt and make the offender suffer, closing our heart's door, we will pay a high price: it will cost us our hope of heaven and our children may also be lost because of our root of bitterness. If we make the choice to forgive, God will give the enabling power to do something we can't do on our own. He will also bring healing to our wounded spirit that will free us to continue becoming more and more like Him.

Our Savior hung on a cross nearly 2000 years ago, praying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners

against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3).

—Bro. Bob Wilson

MARCH 26, 2017

IN JOYFUL THANKSGIVING: WORSHIP MUST BE HAPPY

Psalm 100:1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 56:7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

Hebrews 13:15 By him [Jesus] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

1 Peter 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. —Psalm 134:1-2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The true worship of God is joyful. The sacrifices we offer now as saints of God are those of thanksgiving

and praise, which we should offer continually in our everyday life. When we come together in the sanctuary we should come to bless the Lord and rejoice with unspeakable joy and gladness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 100:1 “Make a joyful noise”: a sound of the highest praise; a loud noise; to shout, such as loyal subjects give when their king appears among them. “We should shout as exultingly as those do who triumph in war and as solemnly as those whose utterance is a Psalm. It is not always easy to unite enthusiasm with reverence, and it is a frequent fault to destroy one of these qualities while straining after the other. The perfection of singing is that which unites joy with gravity, exultation with humility, fervency with sobriety.” —*Treasury of David*. “All ye lands”: all the inhabitants of the earth.

2 “Gladness”: delight, joy, pleasure, mirth.

4 “Thanksgiving”: from a root meaning *to extend the hand*; acknowledgement, confession, praise, avowal, adoration. “Praise”: general public hymns of adoration.

Hebrews 13:15 “Fruit of our lips”: an expression taken from Hosea 14:2. What the lips produce; the words or confession of our lips being a sacrifice—of praise, instead of calves or bullocks or the grain offering.

1 Peter 1:8 “Unspeakable”: unable to fully describe or report; impossible to communicate (convey) adequately by words.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Psalm 100 is the last one of seven Psalms specifically applied by the Jews to the times of the Messiah. Beginning at Psalm 93 we are commanded over and over to worship and exalt Him for His glorious reign and bountiful providence. There is a hint of the worldwide scope of His kingdom and the inclusion of the Gentiles. There are commands as to the manner of acceptable worship and how to approach and begin a time of collective worship.

God’s people, ever falling prey to murmuring, had been given a warning in Deuteronomy 28:47. Because they didn’t serve the Lord with gladness and joyfulness in return for the abundance of the

things God had given them, they would be made to serve their enemies in hunger, nakedness and want. How crucial this quality of joy was to the worship of God and to their daily lives!

God yearned for their joyful worship and looked forward into the years for it when they would return from their captivity and serve Him once again. The prophet Isaiah's vision encompasses more than that, however. Far into the future he looked, envisioning the true worship from hearts made free from sin's captivity and rejoicing in the wonders of the kingdom of His dear Son! It was a completion of His love poured out upon us. He delights in and rejoices over us. He sings love songs of His care and deliverance to us. And we reciprocate with all of our hearts to Him in songs of praise and thanksgiving, and toward others in acts of service and mutual devotion. Surely this was His intent and His design: worshipping, for which we were created, not only blesses Him but blesses us and our fellow man, drawing us into close, affectionate fellowship and communion! "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" —Psalm 107:8

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *With Gladness:* How important was this particular quality in God's sight?
2. *Approach:* How are we to enter His presence?
3. *Return:* How would the captives return to Jerusalem, both in the historical example and in spiritual fulfillment?
4. *In His House:* His house would be a house of prayer for all people. What would God do for them there?
5. *The Sacrifice of Praise:* By Whom and through Whom can we offer this to God? Explain.
6. *With Joy Unspeakable:* Our rejoicing in Jesus is always related to or connected to what action on our part?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

In earlier lessons we studied the way idolatry gets started in the hearts of people—they become unthankful and begin to murmur.

Expressing praise and worship to God from our hearts, not just as we gather collectively but individually all through the day, is the way to keep our hearts and lives clear of murmuring and idolatry. Someone said that praise is conscious admiration and thanks for who God is and what He does. We can practice that as we go throughout the day. Every good gift (and there are so many!); every instance of Divine help or deliverance; every remembrance of His holiness, His wisdom, His power, His love, His care, His provision, His justice, His protection—these are all reasons to admire and praise Him every moment! Do you need His help? Ask Him. Did He help you? Thank Him. And on and on throughout the events of the day.

Living in worship individually prepares us then for a gathering of worship. It is the way to “live in the Spirit.” Then we can be “in the Spirit” on the Lord’s day. Are we commanded to worship the Lord in praise and thanksgiving? Yes, over 250 times in the Scripture. Is that just a suggestion, then, or a mandate? It is commanded. But it’s something more than just a rule. It’s a *relationship*. I praise Him because He is my LIFE. Together, we praise the Lord in song and in prayer. And where praise is, God dwells. He inhabits the praises of His people. As saints of old have praised the Lord, He has filled the house, sent ambushments to their enemies, and broken down prison walls and doors.

I have been humbled and challenged by this study. It has enriched my prayer life; actually, it is transforming my daily life to live in worship and praise moment by moment. My prayer is that you will be transformed, liberated, and blessed, as you too learn to live in true worship.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

How often has a thankful heart routed depression and despair? How often has the glad tidings of God’s love given hope to the weary soul and lifted the heavy heart? Sometimes the noise of battle is the joyful noise of singing the praises of God. It may be out of tune or off key to the natural ear but to the ear of our Creator our heart’s song can be in perfect harmony to His will.

So many times the Lord gives a song in the midst of a fierce battle and as we begin to sing and to praise, the Lord sets an ambush

against the enemy and soundly defeats him. Praise is our offering to the Lord. It is our sacrifice to him and an essential part of our worship, whether individually or corporately. The weapons of praise are simple but highly effective and are necessary to every Christian's arsenal. David's weapon of choice when facing Goliath was five smooth stones and a simple sling. An unsophisticated and seemingly inadequate weapon but one that he knew well.

Our five smooth stones: joy, gladness, thanksgiving, singing and praise—we all have access to them and we all have experience with them. They have the power to turn the tide of the battle, to lift the spirit, to rejuvenate the armies of God and to restore the confidence of the saints.

When we gather for worship let us remember that Satan will attempt to meet us there, to depress, discourage and distract us. But there is great power in praise! Our weapons may seem to be simple and unsophisticated but they are powerful and have a dual purpose, to glorify God and to utterly defeat Satan. Let us use them without reserve. Let us be assured that we can sing and praise our way to victory without ever raising our sword. Praise God!

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

