

# Happy Are You, O Israel!



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Leviticus 9; 10:1–11; Rev. 20:9; Deut. 33:26–29; 1 Samuel 1; 15:22, 23.*

**Memory Text:** “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (*Isaiah 5:20, 21, NKJV*).

In cultures focused on individuality, it is so easy to forget what must always be the starting point of all worship: the action of God in history. Authentic worship should be the Christian's heartfelt response to God's mighty acts, both in Creation and in Redemption (again, the first angel's message motif). True worship comes from our response to God's love and should impact every area of our lives. In the end, authentic worship is not just what we do on Sabbath; it should permeate all areas of our lives and not just in church.

Especially in our desire to be relevant, it is so easy to shift the focus of worship solely onto ourselves, our needs, our desires, and our wants. And though worship should be personally satisfying, the danger comes from how we seek to experience that satisfaction. Only in the Lord, only in the One who created and redeemed us, can we find true satisfaction, as much as is possible in a sinful, fallen world.

This week we will look further at some of the lessons about true worship that we can learn from Israel's history, both from the good things that happened and from the bad.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.*

## The Dedication

Seven days of consecration had passed (*see Leviticus 8*). On the eighth day the priests entered their sacred ministry in the sanctuary. They were starting a work that would continue (though not without interruption) for more than fourteen hundred years, a work that prefigured the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the true sanctuary where Christ now ministers on our behalf.

**Read** Leviticus 9. What elements appear here that teach us about worship? That is, what truths are taught by the various rituals that help us understand the work of God for humanity and why we worship Him? For example, what does the work of “atonement” teach us about what God has done for us and why we worship Him?

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Verses 22–24 are especially fascinating. It is hard to imagine what must have gone on in the minds and hearts of Moses and Aaron as they entered the sanctuary and then came out, only to have “the glory of the Lord” appear before all the people. Though the text does not say what exactly happened, there were a lot of people in the camp at that time, and for all of them to have seen it means that it must have been something spectacular. Perhaps the glory was manifested by what happened next: “and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces” (*Lev. 9:24, NKJV*).

The tabernacle had been dedicated and the priests consecrated to the service of divine worship. Holy fire appeared as a token that the sacrifice had been accepted. The people responded in unison—with a shout of praise, and then fell on their faces in humility before the glory of God’s holy presence. What we see here is intense reverence, awe, and obedience; every detail of God’s commands were followed, and the Lord showed His acceptance of what they had done.

**Notice their reaction: they shouted and also fell on their faces. However intense the whole service was, their reaction was one of reverence, joy, and fear—all at the same time. How can we learn to manifest this kind of reverence and joy in our own worship services?**

## Fire From Before the Lord

“Assisted by his sons, Aaron offered the sacrifices that God required, and he lifted up his hands and blessed the people. All had been done as God commanded, and He accepted the sacrifice, and revealed His glory in a remarkable manner; fire came from the Lord and consumed the offering upon the altar. The people looked upon this wonderful manifestation of divine power with awe and intense interest. They saw in it a token of God’s glory and favor, and they raised a universal shout of praise and adoration and fell on their faces as if in the immediate presence of Jehovah.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 359. It is hard to believe that after something so dramatic, a terrible fall would immediately follow. One would have thought that with such a demonstration of God’s power, all the people, particularly the priests (especially priests as highly honored as these), would have fallen strictly in line. How foolish we are to ever underestimate the corruption of the human heart, especially our own!

**Read** the story of Nadab and Abihu in **Leviticus 10:1–11**. **Who were they? What was their sin? Compare Exod. 30:9, Lev. 16:12, 10:9. After what just happened in the previous chapter, what significance is found in how they died? What important gospel lesson can we learn from this tragic story?**

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The Hebrew wording in both Leviticus 9:24 and 10:2 was the same: “and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed” (9:24, *NKJV*). Consumed what? In the first case, the offering; in the other, the sinners. What a powerful representation of the plan of salvation. At the Cross, the “fire from God,” the wrath of God, “consumed” the offering, and that was Jesus. Thus, all who put their faith in Him never have to face that fire, that wrath, because a substitute did it for them. Those, however, like these priests, who reject God’s way for their own, will have to face that fire themselves (*Rev. 20:9*). The same glory that was revealed at the Cross will be the glory that, in the end, destroys sin. What a stark and unambiguous choice is before us all.

**In one sense, if you think about it, fire is fire. What is the difference? Obviously, in this case, it was a big one. Think about not just how you worship but your life in general. What, if any, “strange fires” might you need to put out in your life?**

## Happy Are You, O Israel

Picture the scene: the faithful servant Moses, rebuked by the Lord for his outburst of anger, stands before the nation of Israel (*Num. 20:8–12*).

Later on, Moses knows that he is soon to die. How easily he could have wallowed in self-pity and frustration. Even then, however, his thoughts were for his people and for the future they were to face. Standing before the people as their leader for the last time, Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pronounced a blessing on each tribe. He then ended with a benediction.

**Read** Deuteronomy 33:26–29. What is Moses saying here that can help us better understand what it means to worship the Lord? What truths, what principles, can we apply as we seek to learn more about what true worship is?

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The word *Yeshurun* is a poetic term for Israel (*see Deut. 33:5, 26*). It comes from a root word (*yashar*) meaning “upright” or “straight,” not merely physically but also morally. Job was described (*Job 1:1*) as “perfect and upright” (*from yashar*); see also Psalms 32:11, 97:11, and Proverbs 15:8. Hence, Moses is talking about what God’s people ideally should be like, those who have entered into a covenant relationship with Him.

As always, the key focus here is upon God’s acts on behalf of His people. All of the things that will happen to Israel—victory over enemies, safety, salvation, the fruit of the land—is theirs because of what the Lord has done for them. How crucial that they never forget these important truths. Among many of the things that worship can do for us is that it can be a constant reminder of what “the God of Jeshurun” has done for us. Praise, worship, and adoration—whether coming verbally from our lips or expressed in the thoughts of the heart and mind—can go a long way in helping us keep focused on God and not on ourselves and our problems.

**Think about all that you have to praise and worship the Lord for. Why is it so important to keep all these blessings, all that He has done on your behalf, before you at all times? Otherwise, how easy is it to fall into discouragement?**

## An Attitude of Surrender

Worship, in the Bible, is serious business. It is not a matter of personal taste, nor is it a matter of doing one's own thing or following one's own proclivities. There is always the danger of falling into dead rituals and traditions that become ends in themselves instead of the means to an end—and that end is true worship of the Lord in a way that changes our lives and brings us into conformity with His will and character (*Gal. 4:19*). We must be careful not to allow self-exaltation, sinful gratification, and a desire for personal glory to dictate how we worship.

We now jump ahead a number of years in Israelite history and read a simple story that can help reveal to us how true worship can be expressed in the heart of a penitent soul.

**Read 1 Samuel 1, the story of Hannah. What can we take from her experience that helps us understand the meaning of worship and how we are to worship the Lord?**

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However much we must remember that God Himself should be the focus of our worship, we do not worship God in a vacuum. We are not worshipping a distant, far off, abstract being; we are worshipping the God who created and redeemed us and who interacts in human affairs. We are worshipping a personal God who intervenes in our lives in the most intimate ways, ways that will help us with our deepest needs if we allow Him to.

Hannah worshiped the Lord from the most hollow recesses of her soul. In a sense, we are all like Hannah. We all have heartfelt and deep needs that, in and of ourselves, we cannot meet. Hannah came before the Lord in an attitude of complete self-surrender. (After all, how much more self-surrender could one find than to be willing to give up your child?) We can, and should, come before God with our needs; but we always must make those needs subordinate to the Lord's calling in our lives. True worship should flow from a broken heart totally aware of its own helplessness and dependence upon God.

**What are the broken places inside you? How can you learn to give them to the Lord?**

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## Worship and Obedience

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam. 15:22, 23).

**Read** the above passage. What crucial principle can we take away from it concerning what constitutes true worship? What does it warn us against? How can we make sure we are not guilty of exactly what these verses warn about?

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Those verses unfold in the context of the continued downfall and apostasy of Saul, Israel’s first king. Saul was to attack and utterly destroy (the Hebrew word suggests “dedicated to destruction”) every person, every animal. God planned to use Israel to bring judgment on this wicked nation, the Amalekites, that in mercy He had delayed for some three centuries. Despite explicit instruction about what to do, Saul openly disobeyed (1 Sam. 15:1–21), and now he was going to reap the consequences of his actions. Samuel’s answer to Saul in verses 22 and 23 helps us better understand what real worship should be about.

1. God would rather have our hearts than our offerings. (If He truly has our hearts, the offerings will follow.)
2. Obedience is more pleasing to Him than are sacrifices. (Obedience is our way of showing that we understand what the sacrifices are truly about.)
3. Stubbornness, insisting on our own way, is idolatry because we have made a god of ourselves, our desires, and our opinions.

**Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart as you ask yourself the following: In what areas in my life may I be choosing to follow my own desires and opinions rather than letting God lead me? What applications can I make to my worship experience from the example of Saul in his fatal presumptions?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Sin of Nadab and Abihu,” pp. 359–362; “The Presumption of Saul,” pp. 616–626, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God has pronounced a curse upon those who depart from His commandments, and put no difference between common and holy things.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 360.

“[Saul’s] fatal presumption must be attributed to satanic sorcery. Saul had manifested great zeal in suppressing idolatry and witchcraft; yet in his disobedience to the divine command he had been actuated by the same spirit of opposition to God and had been as really inspired by Satan as are those who practice sorcery; and when reproved, he had added stubbornness to rebellion. He could have offered no greater insult to the Spirit of God had he openly united with idolaters.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 635.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it so important in worship to truly keep Christ as the center? However subtle, what other things can come in and take our focus off the Lord as we worship? In what ways might we be in danger of using the Lord, or the name of the Lord in praise and song, as merely a cover for the worship of something else?
- ❷ What are ways that we can be hypocritical in worship? That is, what does it say about us if, when outside of church itself we act one way and then inside church we are full of praise and adoration and worship? Though none of us is perfect, shouldn’t the lives we lead be connected with the kind of worship we practice? Sadly, some people go to church, “worship,” and then go home and abuse their spouses and children or engage in other evil behavior. How do such practices make a mockery of our worship?
- ❸ Go back over the memory verse for this week and apply it in the context of worship. How can we be sure that we are not doing exactly what we are being warned against here?
- ❹ How can you better learn the art of worship, the art of self-surrender to the Lord? How can you learn to draw closer to the Lord in your own private time of worship?

# Teaching the Teacher

by JACQUELINE THERMIL

Dieuseul Placid was one of my teachers in secondary school. After I graduated, I studied theology at Haiti Adventist University. Later, when I returned to my home, a church elder asked me to visit my former teacher. “He’s interested in the Adventist faith,” the elder said. I visited my teacher and heard his interesting story.

“My friends and I sometimes talk about voodoo,” Dieuseul told me. “I don’t practice voodoo, but I wanted to know about it. One day my friend told me that he could kill anyone through evil spirits.

“Another man disagreed and told us that a good Christian—especially a good Seventh-day Adventist—is immune to the evil spirits. I asked my friend what’s so special about Adventists that they are immune to the devil’s power. My friend explained that Adventists follow the Bible and teach God’s straight truths. They are powerful in prayer and can even cast out spirits from people who are possessed. I wondered about the secret that made these Adventists resistant to the devil’s power.”

After Dieuseul related his conversation to me, he asked me to study the Bible with him. I gladly agreed. He warned me that he was studying with several other denominations to see which one was the right church. I was glad, for I knew he was searching for truth.

After a few Bible studies, Dieuseul asked me to meet the others with whom he was studying so we could talk about doctrine. I agreed. When we met, Dieuseul asked to talk about the law and how it reflects God’s character and His love. But the other believers refused to discuss the law of God for various reasons. They wanted to talk about grace instead. But Dieuseul insisted, and before long the others closed their books and left.

We continued studying, and in a short time Dieuseul became convinced of the Bible’s clear and plain truths and asked to become a member of the Adventist Church. He was baptized and today is an elder in his church. The devil lost the argument, and today Dieuseul truly is God’s unique son.

I thank God for honest-hearted souls, such as my former teacher, who are willing to recognize God’s voice and follow His leading. I thank God, too, for your mission offerings, which help build up the church in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the world.



JACQUELINE THERMIL (left) pastors four churches in Haiti.