

Lesson 1

"Worship in Genesis: Two Classes of Worshippers"

The shape of things to come is being more sharply focused day by day--just as the Bible predicted. Two world movements are aligning themselves for the last great conflict: those who worship old covenant *self*-righteousness, identifying with the "beast" and his "image"; or those who worship clothed in the righteousness received by faith in the crucified Lamb's promise of the new covenant (Rev. 13:4, 15; 14:4, 7). Those who accept the latter will worship the Lamb, the Christ of the cross who by His sacrifice "tasted death for every man," and those who worship the beast and his image will worship self.

This final crisis of earth's history will be a challenge to "worship the Lamb" alone, or to worship Baal (all worship of self, which is disguised as the worship of "Christ," is Baal-worship). One group will have faith in the promises of God, the other in the "righteousness" of human promises. One will appreciate the breadth, depth, length, and height of "the *agape* of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:14-21), while the other will believe a false view of the cross, a counterfeit misrepresentation of the gospel which will be the worship of a false "christ." One will believe God's one-sided promise: "I will put My law in their inward parts" (Jer. 31:33), while the other will believe the old covenant bargain with God to do everything just right: "All that the LORD hath spoken *we* will do" (Ex. 19:8). So clever will the deceptions be that "if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24).

The worshipers in Genesis represent the shape of the future. Two brothers attended the same church. On the one hand, the farmer worked hard, obeying God's commandment, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). He expected God to *reward* him for his labor ["man can depend upon his *own efforts* for salvation" (*Patriarchs and Prophets* [PP], p. 73), "*self-dependence*" (ibid., p. 72)]. Cain felt rejected and angry when God "had not respect" for his worship (Gen. 4:5).

What Cain missed was a simple *heart*-appreciation for the shed blood of the Lamb of God; his problem was "*unbelief*," a failure to appreciate what it cost the Son of God to save him. On the other hand, Abel the shepherd was convicted as a sinner to worship God through the merits of Christ's blood represented by the lamb (Gen. 4:4; PP 72).

Another example of true worship is Abram who *believed* God's most precious one-sided new covenant promise, "thou shalt *be* a blessing" as well as receive a blessing from Him

(Gen. 12:1-3); by getting "out of [his] country, and from [his] father's house, unto a land that [God] will shew [him]" (vs. 1); in other words, he got out of "Babylon." God did not ask Abram to make a promise of obedience. Believe God's solemn promise and you will be happy and will always bring happiness to someone else.

Abram established the Old Testament gospel by "moonlight." He worshiped God at the altar of sacrifice morning and evening (Gen. 12:8; PP 128). Daily two lambs were offered on behalf of sinners worldwide, whether they believed in the Saviour to whom they pointed or not. "God has encircled the *whole world* with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air [we breathe]" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 68). Much later the New Testament gospel by "sunlight" was proclaimed by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the *world!*" (John 1:29).

So that Abraham might know the fullness of God's love, He asked him to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac as an act of worship (Gen. 22:2, 5). Abraham didn't actually kill Isaac with his knife--but he made the full commitment to make the sacrifice. "'You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me,' said God" (vs. 12). It reflected Christ's cross. Christ didn't go into the literal lake of fire, but He made the full commitment, and thus He died the equivalent of our second death.

The Father and the Son are equal in their giving the sacrifice of atonement for sinners. "We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, but that He so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for us" (*Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895).

Jesus' words in John 3:16 were inspired by Abraham and Isaac's sacrifice. Isaac was Abraham's one and only unique son of God's covenant promise (Gen. 13:16). When you see Jesus' love for the world at the cross you see the Father's love for the world.

The good news that we are learning about the atonement from the 1888 message is that Jesus identified with the whole race of sinners. He took our fallen selfishness and He satisfied the full justice of the law by choosing to die the second death as a demonstration for all time of His victorious unselfish love. "The death of Christ was expedient in order that mercy might reach us with its full pardoning power, and at the same time that justice might be satisfied in the righteous substitute" (Ibid.). His self-denying love compels us to identify with Him by "follow[ing] the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:4). To "worship Him" is to "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (vss. 7, 12).

Another example of worship in Genesis is Jacob. After cheating Esau out of his birthright and lying to his father Isaac, Jacob fled home feeling himself the most God-forsaken man

on earth. Worshiping God was the last thing on this guilty man's conscience. With a stone for a pillow the agonizing young man was given a vision by God of a ladder upon which angels ascended and descended (Gen. 28:12). The ladder represented Jesus (PP 184). "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *upon* the Son of man" (John 1:51).

Jacob was such a deceptive, self-centered person that his name meant supplanter. But God loves good people as well as bad people. It is not possible for us to do good and make Him love us better than others. God does not forsake either the good or the bad. When you make a mistake you feel guilty and polluted and you feel that God no longer loves you.

Why does God love good people and bad? When Jesus gave Himself on His cross, He bought you. God the Father "chose" you to be His child "through Christ." He made you "His son." He adopted you (Eph. 1:4, 5). An adopted child is just as much loved as one who was born in the family. If an adopted child makes a mistake, the new parents never disown him. So, when you feel guilty, when the Holy Spirit convicts you that you have sinned, remember that the Father loves you just the same.

Now, let Him clean you; accept His forgiveness. Thank Him that He still has "adopted" you into His family. Be glad for His love that never can fail. That's what it means to "overcome" like Jacob of old.

Jacob worshiped God at Bethel by anointing his stone pillow with oil as a memorial of the ladder-gateway to heaven (Gen. 28:17, 18). Jacob sometimes had trouble remembering that dream, just like sometimes you have trouble remembering God's goodness to you. Jacob had plenty of disappointments and sorrows, and he had to spend a whole night wrestling with the Lord in prayer (Jacob's time of trouble). But his name was changed from Jacob to Israel (overcomer).

Everyone who enters heaven will be a child of Jacob. The Lord addresses His people as "O house of Jacob" (Isa. 2:5). Both now and during the future time of Jacob's trouble all self-centered relationship-worship will be purified of its motives for a hope of reward with a faith-worship motivated by *agape*. And so will your name be changed! Accept some encouragement from the story of your "father" Jacob.

--Paul E. Penno