



Worship

Lesson Aim: To encourage realization of the fact that in the midst of battles, of marching toward the goal, of the discipline of a people, God wills that His people also worship and learn of Him.

L4. Date: April 1959. **Text:** Joshua 8:30-35. **Topic:** Worship: Commanded.

Today, we study of a great worship service held in the valley between mount Gerizim and mount Ebal. Let us observe the spiritual experiences which brought Israel here: From sin to repentance to forgiveness to victory to worship. This is the trail of revival experience.

There is something sacred about any worship experience. It is that occasion when God's people lay all else aside and for a period of time devote all their mind and heart to seek God and commune with Him. This is holy ground and we approach our study today with a sense of reverence. God is here. His people stand before Him to present themselves to His service and receive their commission again. Let us picture ourselves standing there among the people of Israel as the sacrifice is offered and the Law is read. Then, with the holy scene still fresh in our minds, let us go into the worship service of our own church to seek God there.

Mount Ebal and mount Gerizim were located near Shechem (the New Testament town of Sychar) in what was afterwards the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. They had been commanded to come here and perform this ceremony, Deuteronomy 27:2-8. Now that the possession of the land had actually begun they gathered here to write and hear the reason of the Law. Thus they renewed the covenant with God by a formal profession of subjection to the Law and a casting of their dependence upon God for success. All this was ratified by sacrificial offerings.

Surely we Christians may learn a lesson here. At the beginning of each new enterprise; at the end of every project, we would do well to pause and stand in God's presence to observe His will and pledge ourselves to renewal effort for Him.

EXPOSITION

I. Worship Must Be Related To Sacrifice, 8:30-31.

It is strange that in the midst of war the whole nation should stop for a worship service. The enemy is everywhere about them. They are in danger of attack. Yet, they stop, build an altar, and offer sacrifices to God. Observe that the altar was built of unhewn stones over which no iron instruments had been raised. The common Jewish interpretation of this (according to Rabbi Mechilta) is that the altar was for the purpose of preserving life (by atonement) which the iron was to destroy life (the sword). It is not fitting that the destroyer should be exalted over the preserver of life. But what is the significance of the sacrifice offered here?

1. Man can approach God only upon the merit of an acceptable sacrifice. Sacrifice and worship have been connected throughout human history, even from the time of the first sons of Adams and Eve. Genesis 4:3-5. There seems to be a universal recognition that man, by himself, is not worthy to stand before God and commune with Him. The blood of the sacrificial victim was to atone for the failures of the worshipper and thus enable him to come before God with petitions and praises. Even the High Priest of Judaism was not allowed to enter the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle upon any common occasion. He entered only on the Day of Atonement, and then only when he had blood to sprinkle. With all our goodness as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), who is qualified to approach God? In all our prayers we plead the merits of another by such expressions as “In Jesus’ name,” or “For Jesus’ sake.”

2. The sacrifices of worship should both bring forgiveness of sin and be an expression of praise. Observe that Israel “*offered thereon burnt-offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace-offerings,*” verse 31. The purpose of burnt-offerings was to make an atonement for sins. After the experience at Ai the nation would be more conscious of sin than ever before. Now they would have the assurance of approaching God in worship, knowing the sufficient sacrifice had been offered and their sins were covered. It is interesting to observe, likewise, that the altar was erected on Mount Ebal, the mount on which the curse was put, Deuteronomy 11:29. It signifies that where they would expect the curse to be executed there had been provision made through sacrifice. The curses pronounced here would have been immediately executed if it had not been for the atonement of the altar. On the other hand, the peace-offering was also offered. This is an

offering which expresses praise. Now that the conquest had begun and God had given them two cities, the spoils of one devoted to God and of the other kept for the nation, it was only right that they should have a “prayer and praise service” to thank God for the victories. They also invoked Divine favour for their future efforts to possess the land. Matthew Henry suggests, “The way to prosper in all that we put our hand to is to take God along with us, and in all our ways acknowledge him by prayer, praise, and dependence.” Paul admonishes us to “*offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name,*” Hebrews 13:15.

3. Our approach to God can only be through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus has given Himself, “*the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God,*” I Peter 3:18. Thereby He became the only means of salvation (Acts 4:12; I John 5:12) and the only way of approach to the Father’s presence. “*I am the way the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,*” John 14:6. It matters not how good a man’s moral character might be, nor how sincere are his religious convictions, if he gains a hearing from God the Father he must approach Him upon the merit of Jesus Christ. Observe how perfectly it is explained in Hebrews 10:19-22: We can enter into the holiest (the very presence of God) by the blood (sacrifice) of Jesus; this new way has been opened for us through the flesh of Jesus (that is, through His ministry in the flesh); Jesus has now become the High Priest over the house of God in our behalf. Praise God! We have no hope except in Jesus Christ, but that is hope enough! Read John 3:1-18, 36; 5:24; Acts 13-38-39.

II. Worship Must Be Related to the Word of God, 8:32, 34.

1. A copy of the Word of God should be kept, verse 32. Of course, printing was not invented in 1400 B.C. and the people did not have copies of their sacred writings as we do today. Here stones are gathered (not the stones of the altar) and are plastered over. Upon this, in the presence of the congregation, was written a copy of the Law. Scholars question whether the part written was the Ten Commandments, a copy of the blessings, and cursings of Moses, a copy of the book of Deuteronomy or the whole Pentateuch. The Bible does not give us definite information. It is content to say the Law was seen in writing by all the people of the nation. Then the Law was read. Thus by the hearing of the ear and the seeing of the eye the people were acquainted with the demands of God.

The modern Christian has a copy of the Word of God near. It is a comforting assurance to the family who has the Bible conveniently near and who uses it. There is really little excuse for one not having the Scriptures.

2. The Word of God is to be read, verse 34. An unused Bible is a useless bible. The words were written upon the stone monuments that they might be read, not simply for ornaments. The king of Israel was commanded to write and read the book of the Law. Now the commoner has the privilege of reading it also. The purpose is that king and commoner alike may know their duties and rights before God and man.

The Bible is not to be beautifully bound, reverently handled, and carefully protected, and nothing more. It is to be diligently studied (seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit for interpretation)—to be looked through that one may see himself and his generation in the true perspective. It should be memorized in portions for protection against sin (Psalm 119:11). It should be taken as a guiding light to one's life (Psalm 119:105). It should be anxiously sought (Luke 5:1). It should be boldly spoken (Acts 4:31). It should be faithfully shared with others (Acts 8:14; 13:7; 16:9-10). It completely qualifies one for every type of service for God (II Timothy 3:16-17). No wonder Paul has urged, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,*" II Timothy 2:15. Is anyone a truly dedicated Christian who finds no joy in the Word of God? The Psalmist says of the blessed man, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doeth he meditate day and night," Psalm 1:2.

III. Worship Must Be of Concern to All the People, 8:33, 35b.

1. It should be of concern to the leaders of the people. "*Their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side of the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites,*" verse 33. Those who are in positions of leadership carry a double responsibility. They must be true to their own souls in obedience to God, and they must be true in view of the influence they will have on others. What a tragedy when the blind lead the blind! The Bible recognizes a special responsibility to rest upon those who have the opportunity to guide others. To parents, it commands personal obedience to the law, plus the opportunity of teaching it to the children, Deuteronomy 6:1-13; Joshua 1:7-8. To all religious, political, social, or family leaders, the Bible commands "*be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,*" I Timothy 4:12. What

greater challenge could any person have than to be a living demonstration of the teachings of the Scriptures?

2. It should be of concern to the women and children, verse 35b. Judaism has never held that women should be kept in ignorance. On the contrary, it has a respect for womanhood and looks upon her as a responsible creature of whom God expects worship and obedience the same as man. This concept of woman goes far beyond anything found among any other nation of people at this date. Divine revelation had shown women to be the creation of God and not to be man's slave.

The children, likewise, were to be carefully instructed, *"that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it,"* Deuteronomy 31:13. Thank God for parents who take this responsibility seriously. One of the greatest compliments given to Eunice, mother of Timothy, is in the words of Paul to Timothy, *"from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,"* II Timothy 3:15. Here is a heritage which all the money in the world cannot buy. The few minutes spent in a family altar reading the Scriptures and praying, are of untold worth in the spiritual development of children. If not already a practice, will you resolve to begin it today? *"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel,"* I Timothy 5:8.

3. It should be of concern to citizens of other nations, "strangers." Thank God the message of truth is not intended for Jews alone. It is for all men. "Whosoever will" resounds throughout the pages of that wonderful Book The gospel is addressed to all the world—to every creature (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). This may be done through loyal support of the missionary, educational, and publication ministry of our Baptist Missionary Association.

IV. Worship Must Not Exclude Any of God's Revelation, 8:34-35a.

With the people gathered in a natural amphitheatre, Joshua stood in the valley between mount Ebal and mount Gerizim. He caused the law to be read in the hearing of the people—both the blessings and the curses. It was important that the people know both. The revelation therein was incomplete without both.

There is a temptation for the Christian to read only those portions of the Bible which appeal personally to him. This is a mistake. To play about in the Bible, being content to read a few Psalms and bits from the New

Testament is to deceive one's self concerning Bible truth. One needs to read Old Testament and New Testament; to read the books of law, history, poetry, prophecy; and all other sections of the Bible. If one will read three chapters each weekday and five chapters on Sunday, he can read the Bible through in 365 days. It would be a worthy project for any person to undertake.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Locate Mount Ebal And Mount Gerizim on a map of Palestine.
2. Why is sacrifice so important in connection with worship?
3. Through what sacrifice do we approach God?
4. What place should the Word of God have in worship?
5. Why should leaders know and obey the law of God?
6. Discuss the responsibility of parents to teach children the Bible.