

PRE-LAW WORSHIP

The Bible does not inform us about what God revealed to Adam and Eve concerning worship. Until they were driven from the Garden of Eden, they seemingly were able to communicate with God and personally express worship to Him. Whether they worshiped or how they worshiped God before and after being separated from God is not revealed.

The first mention in the Bible of worship of God is in regard to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3–5a). Because God accepted grain sacrifices under the law given to Moses, some have considered that the problem with Cain's sacrifice was not what he offered, but his attitude when he offered his sacrifice.

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4).

Abel's sacrifice was offered "by faith," which must imply that Cain's was not offered by faith. God must have revealed to Cain and Abel, either directly or through Adam, what to sacrifice and how to prepare the offering. Not only did Abel offer an animal, but he also offered the fat of the first of his flocks (Genesis 4:4). In doing this, he received witness that he was righteous (Hebrews 11:4).

John wrote that Cain's "deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12b). Doing by faith what God has requested is the righteous thing to do. This is what Abel did. Acting without authority from God is evil. This is what Cain did, so his deeds were evil.

Both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to the Lord (Genesis 4:3, 4). They both sought to worship God by offering their sacrifices. Evidently, God not only wants worship, but He also requires the kind of worship that pleases Him.

The Book of Genesis mentions the building of altars for sacrifice but does not always reveal what was offered on them (Genesis 12:7, 8 [see 13:4]; 13:18; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1–3, 7). When the nature of the offering is stated, only animals are mentioned as being sacrificed before the Law was given (Genesis 8:20; 22:9–13). Based on these facts, we are probably correct in concluding that God required the animal sacrifice offered by Abel but did not want the grain sacrifice of Cain.

After Cain and Abel, nothing is stated to reveal the nature of worship until Noah's offering after the flood. We can assume that the descendants of Seth began worshiping God, because they began to "call on the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4:26b). Surely, Enoch worshiped God, for he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24). In subsequent years the people of the earth became very wicked, but Noah found favor in God's eyes (Genesis 6:5, 8).

By doing what God told him to do in building the ark, Noah showed his faith in God (Hebrews 11:7). We can assume that worship was a priority with this righteous man since he made an offering as his first act after leaving the ark (Genesis 8:20). His sacrifice was made from a heart that was thankful to God for bringing him and his family safely through the horrible destruction of the flood. We can also assume that the sacrifices he offered were based on faithful obedience to what God desired. God smelled the burnt offerings as a "soothing aroma" (Genesis 8:21), an indication that God was pleased with Noah's sacrifices.

Abraham's building of altars is mentioned more times in the Bible than that of anyone else. This indicates that Abraham was close to God and sought in all places to worship Him. Nothing that is written implies that he built altars to be used only one time. He most likely used them time and again. His building of altars everywhere he went implies that worship of God was a priority with him.

Isaac and Jacob also built altars, following in

the steps of their ancestor Abraham. God stated that Abraham would command his children to follow the ways of the Lord (Genesis 18:19). Abraham's devotion to God influenced his descendants.

Altars were not the only aids in worship during the period before the Law was given. Andrew Hill pointed out,

... the book of Genesis describes several other expressions of patriarchal worship, including the erection of stone pillars and the pouring of libations (a sacrifice of liquid or drink offering, 28:18, 22; 35:14), the taking of vows in response to divine revelation (28:20; 31:13), ritual purification in preparation to meet God (35:2), the rite of circumcision as a sign of covenant obedience (17:9–14), and prayers of praise and thanksgiving (12:8; 13:4), petition (24:12; 25:21), and intercession (18:22–33; 20:7).¹

¹Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise!* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1993), 33. Perhaps Hill should not have included circumcision in worship of God. A distinction should be made between obedience to and worship of God, even as one would distinguish a slave's obedience to his master from worship of the master.

The only priest of God mentioned during the pre-Law period is Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 5:6). Otherwise, men who were not priests but were heads of the family are depicted as the ones who offered sacrifices. Job offered sacrifices in behalf of his family, and his friends offered sacrifices (Job 1:5; 42:7–9).

SUMMARY

From the earliest time, mankind recognized the need to present gifts to God in appreciation for what He had done for them. The worship of God during the period before the Law was based on an appreciation of God and His mighty acts. Even though sacrifice on altars was the primary worship during this period, God was the object of worship. He was respected, adored, sought, and praised for being great, good, and God. Worship was to God, for God, and of God. No drawings or images were used in worship; God alone was the center of worship. ♦

©Copyright, 2003 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED