

Biblical Overview of Worship, I: Moses

Let us open in prayer.

As we begin we pray that You would give us strength and that You would be present with us. As we now turn our attention to Genesis through Revelation to try to discern and understand what You have revealed regarding worship and what You desire from Your people in relationship to You in worship, we pray that You would show us from Your Word and by Your Spirit what You want us to know and take hold of and work into our lives and out to others. We wait upon You and look to You. Thank You that You are a God who desires to make Yourself known in ways that relate to how You have made us. We pray that we would be attentive to You and to Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We will look in this lesson at the Bible before Moses. There is no written Bible before Moses since he is the writer of the Pentateuch, but we will be looking at Genesis, which covers the time before Moses was born. One of the things I think is important to understand is the way God has made himself known in Scripture. He has not given us a Bible dictionary. It is not as if we can say, "I want to know everything in the Bible that has to do with worship," then turn to the back of the Bible and look up "worship" and find everything we need to know about worship, including three options for complete worship services and what to preach on. God has revealed Himself relationally, in history, interacting with people. He makes Himself known in what we sometimes call a "progressing, unfolding revelation" that keeps building on what came before and keeps going somewhere. There is an end in view. So as we turn to the Scripture we have to be discerning of the framework of Scripture itself. This is in order that we can take hold of the truths God has put there regarding worship in a way that then applies to living in our place in the story, between Pentecost when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the church, and His return. Even when we are approaching pre-Fall Genesis, as we will be doing now, we are doing it as people who live post-Pentecost. We know more than is just right here. But at the same time we need to try to get inside the story, here of creation before the Fall, to try to understand what was being made known to the original hearers of the Scripture.

The framework of Scripture can be described as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This is the framework. But there is more than just these large categories. We need to understand that all of this is headed somewhere. What God reveals at one point in the story carries forward everything He has revealed before. We cannot just take a slice out and say, "This is where we are." We are in redemption, after Pentecost and before the second coming. But simply because we live after the first coming of Jesus we do not only look at the New Testament. We need the whole story that has gone before us, starting at creation. We have this richness that helps us understand what happens in our time. For example, there are sections in the Old Testament like Joel 2 that point forward to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and are crucial to our understanding of Pentecost. We need to look at both promise and fulfillment in Scripture. We need to have this in mind when we look at matters related to worship. I do not know of any denomination or congregation that says it is appropriate to come to worship with bulls and goats and lambs and slaughter them as part of worship. Everyone does something with what has come before, realizing that there are things that continue forward and things that no longer continue because they have been fulfilled. Everyone would agree based on 1 Corinthians 5 that Jesus is our Passover Lamb. This is also attested to in John 1:29b: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" There is something about Jesus and what He has done that fulfills the Passover meal and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. We still need to seek to understand and learn from those things, but we also need to place them in the larger biblical context.

As we begin at Genesis, then, we need to try to understand, if we can, what worship looked like before the Fall. That is a bit challenging because there is not much that we can point to and say, “Here is a specific instruction on corporate public worship.” You sort of have to put yourself in that context and ask some questions to get at what is going on there. What I have discovered is that you have what we can call the regulative principle of life. In many ways, any discussion of the regulative principle of worship (which we will have an entire lesson on later) needs to be set in the context of the regulative principle of life. What you read in the early chapters of Genesis is that there is a God who made all things. He is the sovereign ruler over all things, and He has an expectation that the creatures made in His image will live before Him and follow what He created them to do. He created life and He regulates it, for our good and for His glory.

Adam and Eve were placed in a garden with certain parameters. They were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but there were other kinds of trees. There seems to have been much freedom, much latitude for them. There is the instruction, “...a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” There is also the command, “Be fruitful and multiply.” There are these broad instructions that relate to their life in the garden. They are to cultivate and tend the garden, they are to subdue the earth and rule over it, they name the animals, and so on. There is life and activity going on in Genesis 1-2 that is set in the context of the goodness and the greatness of this God who has made this amazing creation and creatures in His image with whom He has a relationship—He calls them to live a life under Him. Adam and Eve, made in God’s image, have a relationship of serving and worshipping God in the broad sense of worship. They have a relationship to the rest of creation in which they are to be stewards or caretakers of the creation. And they have a relationship to each other—they are to be guardians of the dignity and the value of other creatures made in the image of God. This is man in God’s world.

There is a little book I read a while ago and used when I taught a class at Geneva College called *Man in God’s World* by Paul Scrottenburg. This little booklet was very formative in my understanding of these various relationships for Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall, by God’s design. They were to serve Him, care for one another, and be stewards of the creation. There is a sense in which all of life is lived before the face of God as an act of worship. They walk with Him and talk with Him. There is this dynamic of relationship that is there prior to sin entering the world. There is what I would call a closeness, an intimacy with God and with each other that is by God’s design, that they are to live in the midst of. Many of the good things He has developed are able to be lost, but they are given out of the goodness of God and out of His love for His creatures and His creation.

In many ways you could look at the first two chapters of Genesis and determine that all of what we learn about worship there relates to the category of all of life as worship. I think a great deal of it does. In the pre-Fall world the moving in and out of what we call corporate public worship and all of life as worship seems to be more seamless in its connection, but I think it is there. I think it is there because of Genesis 2:2-3. This passage deals with the institution of the Sabbath, which comes before the Fall. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” Now, what stands out to you in that passage that might help us to understand the significance of this seventh day? The seventh day was blessed. Were the other six days not blessed? There was nothing bad in the other six days, but there is something about the seventh day that He is distinguishing. The difference is not that the others are bad and the seventh is good, but that all the days are good and this is one is blessed in some way. The seventh day was made holy. It was set apart from the other six days. There is no sin in the world yet, but the seventh day is being set apart from the other

six for a particular purpose. What is the purpose? Rest. There is the creation, the first seven days, and on the seventh day God rested and He set apart and blessed this seventh day for the purpose of rest.

What do you think the seventh day looked like for Adam and Eve before the Fall? It is hard for us to imagine any day without sin. And if every day was without sin it would seem like a day set apart for a specific purpose would not be that different, since all the days are without sin. That is the problem with speculation, even sanctified speculation—we do not know what it was like. But there are certain things the Bible tells us. We cannot help but know what the Bible says later because of where we live in the story. We know some things about the Ten Commandments and its words concerning the Sabbath. We know about the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy 5 where there is a link made between the Sabbath rest and a celebration of God's redemption. The fourth commandment says, "Keep the Sabbath day to make it holy." Well, the idea of the Sabbath being holy comes here in the garden. Keeping it holy is necessary after the Fall. In a fallen world certain things become attached to that seventh day that relate to rest and redemption. Redemption was not necessary in the pre-Fall garden, but there was something special about the day. What has God told us about the seventh day before the Fall? It is a day for rest, reflecting His rest. It is a day that is blessed and set apart. Genesis 2:15 says, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Part of what Adam and Eve were to do in the garden was to work it and take care of it, though we know that they were not pulling thorns and thistles yet because that came after the Fall. But there was some work that they were to do in tending the garden. We are not given any detail, but we can imagine.

One of the things I have recently enjoyed more than I have in the rest of my life is taking care of flowers and plants around the house. I water them, which is not particularly difficult—and then we wonder, is it because of the curse that they need to be watered? I take off the dead flowers. It is not particularly hard work, but again it is hard to imagine what it would have been like in the garden. Maybe there was such an abundance of fruit that some of it fell to the ground before they could harvest it all and it rotted and so they had to throw the rotten fruit into the compost pile to help fertilize something else God wanted to make grow. I do not know. But it seems like there is certain activity they were to be busy about doing—they were commanded to work and take care of the garden. On the seventh day they were not to work and take care of the garden in the same way. We do not know exactly what that looked like, but we can say that because of what the Bible tells us. Their life was to be patterned after what God did. He worked for six days and then He entered into a rest. The pattern is filled out more later in Revelation, as we will see. But they followed after God's pattern.

I think there is at least some primary foundation being laid here for what we call corporate public worship. I will not suggest to you that these first two chapters in Genesis enable us to say that Adam and Eve went to church on Sunday. They obviously did not get clothed in their Sunday best, since they were already wearing their everyday best. But maybe they got together and reflected. Maybe it was a celebration. Maybe it was a delighting in God and what He had made and the way He had made it in a way that was more reflective than the day-to-day pattern. Again, we do not know. But we can say that God rested on the seventh day, He blessed it and made it holy, and this becomes a creational pattern of one day in seven for rest and maybe reflection and delighting and celebration. It may not be too much of a stretch to put that in there. This does not mean that the other days are bad. It means that this day is made distinct. I think you can clearly argue that there is something distinguishable about this day that does not relate to sin but relates to God's design, His structuring and ordering of things. The main thing to remember, though (I think), is the intimacy of relationship, living life before the face of God and offering their lives up to God almost as a living sacrifice under this regulative principle of life. The Lord has a few things to say in there first two chapters of Genesis about work, a few things about marriage and family, which is a part of the ordering of life, and He has a few things to say about this seventh day.

Sometimes we have called these the three creation institutions: work, marriage, and rest. Beyond that there is not much more we can say.

We begin to see what happens, then, in the Fall. When Adam and Eve disobey God there are serious consequences. They fear God in a way that makes them want to hide from Him. They are ashamed of their nakedness and want to cover it. They are alienated from God and are eventually put out of the garden. Thus there is distance and separation, and this intimacy of relationship is lost. There are consequences that follow: separation and distance. This becomes important later in the pattern of the tabernacle and the temple and the way of drawing near to God by blood sacrifice. This plays out in the way the high priest is the only one allowed into the Holy of Holies and then only on the Day of Atonement. All this is partly a matter of the distance that was lost, being regained and restored—which is ultimately what Christ came to do. He came to bridge the distance, the separation between God and sinful people, that we might be able to be brought near by the blood of Christ. There is nearness that is lost in the Fall. Therefore God in His grace must initiate activity, provide covering for them and so on in order to restore fellowship between humans and Himself.

I think the account of Cain and Abel bringing offerings to God in Genesis 4 begins to show us the manner of approaching God with a sacrifice. We do not have any instruction that God may have given Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel about this. All we have is a narrative account of two sons of Adam and Eve who are approaching God in what I think we would call worship. Let us read Genesis 4:1-7:

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

Many people have said many things about what is going on in this passage. I remember as a child in Sunday school, the simple explanation of this was, Cain did not offer an animal sacrifice with blood while Abel did. Therefore Abel’s sacrifice was accepted and Cain’s was not. Now, I do not think that is the primary thing that is going on here. It says that Abel’s work was dealing with flocks and Cain’s work was tilling the soil. The fruit of their work was being offered to God. I think you can make something of the distinction here between what kind of fruit they brought: “Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil...But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.” There seems to be a quality of sacrifice, whether grain or animal, that is being distinguished here in this narrative account. We gain some insight on this account from Hebrews 11:4, the New Testament, inspired commentary on this event: “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” I think the difference between Cain and Abel, what made Abel’s offering better, is that it was offered from a heart of faith. I do not want to diminish the importance of bringing the fat portions of the firstborn of the flock, but I think it was the fruit of a heart of faith toward God. Even Cain here is given an opportunity, it seems, to approach God correctly. The LORD says, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” Even if you want to adopt the theory that there needs to be a blood sacrifice, Cain had the opportunity to give some grain to his brother in exchange for an animal of the flock to sacrifice. It is not like Cain did not have anything to offer. Even if

he had to offer an animal, he could have gotten one from his brother. The LORD came to Cain in a gracious manner, saying, “You do not need to be downcast about this. You can go about this the right way.” At that point I think Cain’s response should have been repentance, faith, and offering the best of his grain.

I think what comes through here is the importance (because of the distance and separation) of approaching God with a heart of faith, coming with a sacrifice. That seems to be a principle, especially as we look further in the story and God gives much more information in the Mosaic legislation regarding the sacrificial system. The principle is coming in faith before God with the right kind of sacrifice as we approach, drawing near to him. Later on we see that even the priests must offer sacrifice on their own behalf, as Hebrews points out so clearly. When you draw near to God you come recognizing your sin. You come in repentance and with faith that He invites you, but holding on to a provision of a sacrifice, knowing that without that you risk being struck down for your sin. This is an overall principle of worship that we have here.

Let us jump forward, then, to the patriarchs. There are a number of places we could look, Genesis 4:26 for example. Many of these things just sort of appear in the narrative without much explanation. Here in Genesis 4:26 it says, “Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.” What exactly does that mean? It is in the narrative account. It seems to involve Seth’s son, Enosh. It seems to imply here that people came together to call on the name of the LORD. That may have been a new thing at this time. Maybe enough people had been born in the line of Seth and Adam and Eve’s other children who are having children so that the earth is being populated. They are living a long time and having children. It seems like living to see your great-great-great-great-grandchildren may have been normative before the flood, when you look at the ages of the people. And it does not say, “They went through menopause and stopped having children at age 40.” Menopause may have been at age 400 or something—though I do not know. I am speculating. As things unfold it seems like there may have been in Genesis 4:26 a time when people began to gather together to call on the name of the LORD, which would make this perhaps the first allusion to what we would call corporate public worship. In the time of Noah after the flood it seems from Genesis 8:20-21 that part of the reason that there were seven of each of the clean animals and only two of each of the unclean animals was so that there would be opportunity to make sacrifices while allowing time for the animals to procreate. In Genesis 8:18-22 we are told:

So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

“As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.”

Let us put this in the context of Noah’s story. Everything has just been destroyed in the flood except Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives, and two of each unclean animal and seven of each clean

animal. We do not have a list of clean and unclean animals here. Somehow Noah knew things we are not told.

And God is allowed to do that. He created us with minds that could ask more questions than He has agreed to give us answers to. We have to come to grips with that. Some people die before they come to grips with that. They think, "I must know!" Sometimes we press, wanting to know more than God has designed for us to know. I was talking with one of the students about this matter of Jesus as our worship leader and Him being fully God and fully man, both giving and receiving worship—we are up against the limits of our capacity to understand two of the deepest mysteries in all of God's revelation that He has given us: the Trinity and the incarnation. We should keep pressing to know what He has told us and the implications of it for something like worship. This for me is new territory, especially this idea of Jesus being present and declaring God's name and singing His praises. But we have to rest in God as God understanding things we do not. And we should thank God that our ability to experience the blessing and benefit of these deep mysteries is not dependent on our ability to understand them. If we only experienced the blessing of the Trinity and the incarnation to the degree that we understand them, we would be at a great loss. We experience much more blessing because those things are true beyond our comprehension than we would if they were only true to our level of comprehension.

What we begin to see here in Genesis 8:18-22 is that Noah has been spared by God's undeserved grace. He found favor with God, he found grace. Now the first thing he does when he gets off the ark is to offer this humongous burnt offering of many animals. It does not say how many animals he offered, but it seems like it was quite a few. He took some of all the clean animals and clean birds. Now, if this means that he took some of each kind of clean animal and bird that they had on the ark, that would be many animals. This is the sweet-smelling aroma God smelled in 8:21. In this Noah approached God, who had spared him by His grace. Noah did not presume on God's grace. He did not offer this with the attitude of, "I was spared and no one else was. When we get off the ark I will be king of the whole universe." Noah was spared, he got off the ark, and he offered, as an act of worship to God, these whole burnt offerings to the LORD. I think this is a reflection of how Noah by faith goes forward in relationship with God. He wants to come before Him recognizing He is holy and we are not, and live life in that context.

Let us skip over to Abraham. In Genesis 12:6-8 we see a pattern that begins among Abraham and his offspring: "Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD."

This is a pattern: as they are a nomadic people traveling around, God meets them and does things in their lives or makes promises to them, and then they build an altar and sacrifice on it and call upon the name of the Lord. There is a desire to mark and remember these key redemptive acts and promises with acts of worship that are connected to them. Then there is the Genesis 22 passage where Abraham is called on to sacrifice his son, Isaac. I think one of the key things to remember here is Abraham's belief that the Lord will provide. He tells that to Isaac. Looking at Hebrews 11:19 we see, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." He so believed in God's promise that he believed he would receive his son back from the dead even if he had to go all the way through with sacrificing him. Then the ram in the thicket is God's gracious provision for him. Such a provision was not made for God the Father in the giving up of His own Son on the cross.

Let us look at Job 1:1. We do not know exactly when Job lived or who his forefathers were. I think our best guess is that he was a descendant of Shem, not in the line of Abraham, but who lived around the time of Abraham. But that is a guess, we do not know. Because of his nomadic life with many flocks and herds he seems to parallel Abraham. Job 1:1- says:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Now, it seems like the brothers and sisters took turns eating each day in one of Job's seven sons' homes. They must have loved their sisters really well, or maybe they ate at one of the sisters' homes every third day. However it was, there was some kind of cycle at the end of which Job had a regular pattern of offering sacrifices for his children. Notice here that it was not necessarily because of obvious, outward, sinful or rebellious behavior. Rather, he was concerned that they may have cursed God in their hearts. There are some good parenting principles here. We should not only be concerned with our children's outward behavior, but we need to be concerned with what is going on in their hearts as well. I think this connection between the offering of sacrifices with a concern for sins of the heart is an interesting convergence here in this account of Job.

I think there are some principles here in the worship of the patriarchs that seem to be what was going on at that point in the story. The father acts pretty much like the priest. There is not a distinction between the kingly tribe and the priestly tribe. The father acts as the priest, offering the sacrifice. He does not call on a priest to come and do this. Sacrifices are made. There are the burnt offerings of Noah and of Job. The burnt offerings seem to be the most common offering, as opposed to the more sophisticated distinguishing between different sin offerings, peace offerings, burnt offerings, and so on that comes later. There is a calling on the Lord in connection with the sacrifices. And there is a recognition that God in His grace is the one who provides. He is the one being called upon. There is a dependence upon Him and a desire to be right with Him. The patriarchs approach Him with a kind of respect and honor and even a right kind of fear of His holiness. And yet they approach Him to come near to Him with their sacrifices. We think back to the garden and the distance that came because of the Fall. They are trying to bridge that distance with faith in their hearts and a sacrifice in their hands, calling upon God, thanking Him, and asking forgiveness for sin, as Job does for his children. Here you see some shaping of things in the narrative that (as we will see next time) under Moses are instituted into the ceremonial law of Israel in the sacrificial system. The sacrificial system that comes later is more complex, more specific—we have instructions as well as narrative. Up till now we have not seen instructions like, "When you come together to call upon My name I want you to do this, and I want priests who are dressed like this who have been purified in this way." That instruction comes later, but I think we see some precursors to that, some anticipation of that, some principles at work here in the narratives of the patriarchs.

Both with the Genesis account and the patriarchal period we are working almost completely from narrative accounts. What I have tried to do is highlight some principles without being too dogmatic about what has actually gone on because we do not have sufficient narrative or the instruction that would inform the actions of some of these people.