

Old Testament Worship and Symbols of the Coming Messiah

Pastor James Mumm

In the Ten Commandments, God instructs us to believe in and worship Him alone as God (Exodus 20:1-6, Deuteronomy 5:1-10). Abel believed in and acknowledged God as his Creator and thanked and praised Him as the Giver of all that is good by means of thank offerings (Genesis 4:3-4). Noah built an altar and made thank offerings to God after the Great Flood (Genesis 8:20). Abraham erected altars to the true God as he entered and came to dwell in the Land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7-8). As the apex of God's visible creation, we, human beings, were made to know and trust in God and His love and to thank and praise Him with our hearts, voices, and lives (Psalm 92). Our worship here is a prelude to the eternity of worship which we will joyfully and thankfully render to God in the perfect works to come (Revelation 7:9-12).

Worship in the Old Testament acknowledged God as the Creator and thanked and praise Him as the Giver of all that is good (Psalm 100). It also acknowledged the sins of individuals and nations and the need to humbly repent of sins (Psalm 32 and 51). It found forgiveness and salvation in the Messiah whom God promised to send into the world to make atonement for mankind's sins (Psalm 130, Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 31:31-34). It resulted in a life of faith and dedication to God and His teachings and, commandments (Psalm 25 and Ezekiel 11:19-20).

Old Testament worship looked ahead and found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The price of mankind's atonement would be the blood and life of the promised Messiah. He would go as a lamb to the slaughter and His blood washes even the foulest of repentant sinners clean (Isaiah 1:18 and 53:6-7). The Messiah is Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29). He is "Immanuel, which means, 'God with us.'" (Matthew 1:23). His blood was shed for Jew and Gentile alike on the altar of the Cross and has redeemed every human being from sin, death and eternal damnation (1 John 2:1-2, Ephesians 1:7-8). This wondrous salvation is God's gift to each individual of the Old Testament and New Testament times who trusts in the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-11 and Ephesians 2:8-10). This gracious love, pardon and salvation of God in Jesus Christ moves the believers to strive to live a God-pleasing life (John 15:1-17, Galatians 2:20).

Worship of the one, true God and offerings and sacrifices to Him were the center of the lives of believers since the creation of mankind. The Law of God was written in man's heart at creation and by nature people knew that God is the Creator and is to be worshipped with thanks and praise and with offerings. After the fall into sin, people knew they needed forgiveness from God. The believers in the true God knew His promise of a Messiah who would be born of a woman and would be the Savior from sin, death and eternal damnation (Genesis 3:15, 22:18, Isaiah 7:14, 53:1-12, Micah 5:2).

Worship became more formal and regulated at the time of the Exodus of God's people from Egypt. When Moses climbed the heights of Mt. Sinai, God give him His Law. The Law contained moral, civil and ceremonial regulations which are found in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The ceremonial laws instructed the Israelite People in their worship life. In Exodus 25-40, God instructed Moses and the People of Israel to build a tabernacle to serve as their tent church. (In Leviticus 1-9, 16, 21-25, Numbers 2-9, 15-18, 28-30, Deuteronomy 12-18). God instructed Moses and the Israelites to make the Tabernacle and worship of Him the very center of their daily lives (Exodus 20:1-11, Deuteronomy 5:1-15, 6:4-8, 10:12-12:32).

The Old Testament Tabernacle was called the Tent of the Lord, the Tent of Meeting, the House of the Lord, and the Sacred Tent. The Tabernacle was surrounded by a courtyard which was 150 by 75 feet in size. The courtyard contained the Bronze Altar of Burnt Offerings in which there was always to be a fire and upon which the animal offerings were made to God. There was also the Bronze Laver in the courtyard to be used by the priest for ceremonial washings. The courtyard had an entrance on its east side.

The Tabernacle itself was located at the west end of the courtyard. It was a tent which measured 45 by 15 feet in size. It had an entrance with a curtain on its east side. It was divided into two compartments, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. The Holy Place measured 30 by 15 feet and was the first compartment entered into by the priests of God. The Holy Place contained the Table of Show Bread, the Golden

Candlestick with a shaft and six branches, and the Altar of Incense. The Table of Show Bread was set with golden dishes, bowls, flagons and other utensils. The Show Bread was also called the Bread of Presence. Each Sabbath Day, twelve fresh cakes of unleavened bread were placed on two plates on the table. The old bread was eaten by the priests. The show bread was a symbol of God's providing love and of His desire to commune with His believers even as a loving father enjoys the company of his children (John 14:23, Revelation 3:20). The Golden Candlestick was called the Menorah. It burned consecrated oil and symbolized that God is the Light of the World and that His believers are to be His lights of truth and love on this earth (John 8:12, Matthew 5:14-16). The Menorah was to burn continually as a symbol of God's eternal light of love and holiness. The Altar of Incense was overlaid with gold as was the Table of Show Bread. The daily burning of incense by the priests symbolized the daily prayers of God's people to His throne of grace. The prayers and offerings of His believers are as sweet smelling incense to God (Genesis 8:21, Psalm 141:2). The Israelite People offered daily prayers to God at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM. These were the times of the morning and evening sacrificial services in the Tabernacle. The prayers were offered in the plural, "We thank You, O God—", to remember the unity of God's people as His family of believers.

The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube measuring 15 by 15 by 15 feet. In this Most Holy Place God came to dwell with His believers in a very special way. The cube symbolized the perfection of God's eternal dwelling place in heaven (Revelation 21:1,15,18). The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant or Testimony. This rectangle box was overlaid with pure gold. Its golden cover was the Mercy Seat on which two golden cherubim faced each other with their wings touching above the Mercy Seat. God came to dwell above the Mercy Seat and communicated with the Israelite People through the High Priest. God wished to assure the believers of His loving presence, forgiveness and help (Deuteronomy 31:6,8, Psalm 50:15). A curtain divided the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. On the annual Day of Atonement he entered the Holy of Holies and made sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the People of Israel. The curtain symbolized the sins of the Israelites which earned God's wrath and punishment and separated them from God and His holiness (Isaiah 59:2). The animal sacrifices symbolized the need for the sins of the people to be atoned or paid for by a price or offering to God. The blood and death of these animals had no power or value with which to purchase forgiveness and eternal life for mankind. They were only symbols of the promised Messiah whose blood would be shed to atone for the sins of all people (Ephesians 1:7-8). The Mercy Seat, on which the blood of the animal sacrifices was smeared and sprinkled, symbolized the Cross of Christ and God's mercy and willingness to forgive the sins of the people (Ezekiel 18:31-32, John 3:14-17). God is love and will pardon every sinner who comes to Him in repentance and with faith in the Messiah (Isaiah 55:7, 1 John 2:8-3:2). Inside the Ark of the Covenant was stored a pot of manna, Aaron's rod, and the two tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. These articles were to remind the People of God's providing hand, His establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, and of the moral life they were to live out of love and respect for God. The Ark of the Covenant was covered and carried ahead of the People of Israel as they traveled in the wilderness and entered the Promised Land of Canaan. God's people are to continually follow God and look to Him and His mercy in the Messiah for guidance, help and salvation (Psalm 121:1-2, Hebrews 12:1-3). In Canaan, the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located at Shiloh and later at Jerusalem. During the Time of the Judges, the Ark became an object of superstition and idolatry. God allowed it to be captured by the heathen Philistines. By God's grace, it was returned to the Israelites. In 1004 B.C., it was moved from the Tabernacle into the Great Temple of Solomon. In 587 B.C., it was carried away by the Babylonians when they captured and destroyed Jerusalem and the Great Temple.

The metal used for the Altar and Laver in the courtyard of the Tabernacle was bronze. The metal for the furnishings and utensils in the Holy Place was impure gold. The gold which overlaid the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies was pure gold. The symbolism in the metals speaks of the glory and holiness of God compared to mankind and the sin-corrupted things of this world (Isaiah 6:1-5).

Moses' brother Aaron and his sons were chosen to serve the Lord as His priests. The men of the whole Tribe of Levi were chosen to serve as God's assistants to the priests. The Levites did not conduct the sacrifices or burn incense at the Tabernacle. They were not permitted to see the holy things in the Tabernacle uncovered.

They helped with the work of teaching the Israelite People and with the cleaning, maintaining, taking down and assembling and transporting of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. When the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, the Levites carried the covered Ark of the Covenant before them. The Tabernacle and its furnishings were transported on six wagons. The Levites began as apprentices at age 20, progressed in responsibility of service at age 25, became fully accredited assistants at age 30, and retired at age 50. The chief families of the Tribe of Levi who supplied the assistants to the priests were the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. In the time of King David there were 38,000 Levites serving at different times and in various ways at the Tabernacle. They served in shifts and returned to their cities and farms to be with their families. They were supported by the offering of tithes from the People of Israel. They in turn were to give a tithe of their income to help support the priests.

The priests were Levites who descended from the family of Aaron, the first high priest. A man could not serve as a priest if he had a physical blemish. This symbolized the coming of the Messiah who had to be a sinless servant of God (1 Peter 1:19, Hebrews 7:26). The chief duty of the priests was to prepare and offer the daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices. They also offered the sacrifices brought to the Tabernacle and later to the Temple by individual Hebrews. They conducted the worship services at the Tabernacle and Temple. They kept the holy fire burning in the Altar of Burnt Offerings. This fire was never to go out. It was a symbol of God's eternal love, truth and glory and of the light for God which was to be seen in His believers. The priests wore linen tunics with a linen belt embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet colors. They wore a three-tiered head covering with a high crown. They were not to wear sandals on their feet as they served in the Tabernacle. They were strictly commanded to wash their hands and feet at the Bronze Laver before performing services and sacrifices to the Lord. God demands humility, reverence and purity of His people (Micah 6:8, Leviticus 20:7). Bare feet symbolized such humility and reverence and the washings spoke of the reverence and purity He demands. The ceremonial washing symbolized the cleaning which is given to everyone who humbly repents of sin and trusts in the blood of the Messiah to purify from the filth of sin (1 John 1:7-10).

The high priest served the Lord in the same ways as did the priests. He was the spiritual leader of Israel and was to retain his position until he died. On the annual Day of Atonement he entered the Holy of Holies to make an offering for his sins and the sins of the people. He wore the Ephod over his linen tunic. The Ephod was an embroidered vest with onyx stones on each shoulder with the names of the twelve Tribes of Israel inscribed on them. A breast plate covered his chest with twelve precious stones on it. Under this breast plate he wore the Urim and Thummin, the "lights and perfections", which were used to inquire the will of God in times of national need or trouble. The high priest wore a headdress or turban which was formed by a fine linen cloth which was wrapped around his head. The headdress had a plate of gold at its front with the inscription, "Holiness of God". The high priest and the priests were the mediators between God and the People of Israel. They offered the sacrifices for the sins of the people and prayers were offered to God through them. They symbolized the sacrificial and mediating work of the promised Messiah (Hebrews 9:11-14, 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The offerings to God were either bloody or bloodless offerings. The bloody offerings were oxen, sheep, lambs, goats and doves. The bloodless offerings were flour, cakes, parched corn and wine. These meal or vegetable offerings were also called food or drink offerings. The bloody offerings were types of the perfect offering which the promised Messiah would make in order to atone for the sins of all people (Ephesians 1:7-8, Colossians 1:13-14). The bloody and bloodless offerings were classified as Burnt Offerings, Sin Offerings, Trespass Offerings, Thank or Peace Offerings and Meal Offerings.

Burnt Offerings were bloody offerings and were made every morning and evening of week days and were doubled on the Sabbath Day. They were made on the Feasts of the New Moon, Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Trumpets and Atonement. The priest or the offerer of the sacrifice laid their hands on the head of the animal and symbolically conveyed the sin and guilt of the Israelites or offerer upon the animal. The blood of the slaughtered animal was smeared or sprinkled on the Altar of Burnt Offerings or at its base and at the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Place. The carcass was burned on the altar.

The Sin Offerings were bloody offerings for known or unknown sins against God and mankind. The blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled or smeared on the Altar of Burnt Offerings or at the curtain at the entrance to the Holy Place or on the Altar of Incense.

Trespass Offerings were blood offerings made for special sins which were considered more serious transgressions of God's Law.

Thank Offerings or Peace Offerings were blood offerings of thanksgiving and dedication to God. Only parts of the sacrificed animal were burned on the altar. Part of the meat was eaten by the person and family which made this offering. This meal was a type of communing with God as members of his family.

Meal Offerings were offerings of grain usually made into cakes consisting of fine flour, oil and frankincense. Leaven and honey, symbols of impurity and sin, were not allowed in the Meal Offerings. Salt, a symbol of purity, was included in the offerings. Drink Offerings (libations of wine) accompanied many of the offerings.

The first offerings at Pentecost and Passover were called Wave Offerings. The priest would wave the offerings back and forth before the altar. The first offerings at harvest time were called Heave Offerings. The priest would heave the offering up and down before the altar. A portion of the Wave and Heave Offerings was offered to God and a portion was given to the Levites and priests.

The daily services at the Tabernacle and at the Temple held at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM, were called the morning and evening sacrifices. The order of service was as follows: incense offered to God; sacrifice and offering of a yearling lamb with no blemishes; offering of a meal offering; offering of a drink offering; after the offerings had been made Psalms were sung, prayers recited and personal supplication made. The service of prayer included the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"(Deuteronomy 6:4), a reading from the Torah(the Books of Moses, the Pentateuch), and the pronouncing of the Benediction.

The Sabbath Day services were to remind the Israelites that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and Giver of every blessing (Exodus 20:8-11). They were also to remind the Israelites of God's gracious and mighty deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Sabbath means rest and the worship and rest from labor on the seventh day was a symbol of the eternal joy and rest of heaven (Hebrews 4:9-10). On the Sabbath Day, two additional lambs were sacrificed on the Altar of Burnt Offerings. The morning and evening services at the Temple were accompanied with singing by the Levites, priests and worshippers. In Jerusalem, on Feast or Festival Days, the priests, Levites and worshippers would make joyful processions to the Tabernacle and Temple. When synagogues were established, the Israelites would leave the Temple Court after the sacrifices were made and go to an adjourning synagogue for the readings from the Torah and the Prophets. The Torah was read from beginning to end in a three year cycle. The Sabbath services ended with prayer and the gathering of alms for the poor. The morning service was repeated in the afternoon.

Special feasts or festivals were celebrated by the Israelites in Old Testament times. The Jewish Community has added several festivals to the list of feasts since the days of the Old Testament. There were three Assembly or Pilgrim Feasts held at the Tabernacle and at the Temple in Jerusalem. Each male of twelve years old and older was to attend these annual feasts. In Canaan, they were to travel to Jerusalem for at least one of these feasts. The Pilgrim Feasts were Passover, Weeks or Pentecost and Huts or Tabernacles. 1. The Passover Feast (Pesach) was followed on the next day by the Feast of Unleaven Bread (Matzot). This double feast was celebrated in our April. Passover commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt as the angel of death passed over the homes of the believers who had the blood of a lamb on their doorways. Unleaven Bread was the day of consecrating the first sheaf of the barley harvest to God. The Passover Feast was celebrated by the early Christians and is celebrated by many Christians in our times. It is a celebration of thanksgiving for deliverance and of love and unity in the family of God. The Passover gathering begins with a search for leaven (the house must be emptied of all leaven). The leader of the feast begins the Passover Meal (seder) with a call to worship, a blessing of the candles and of the meal. A first cup of wine and water is mixed (the cup of sanctification). The leader speaks two blessings over the cup and it is consumed. Unleaven bread (matzot) and green herbs are placed on the table. Hands are washed and prayers of thanksgiving are spoken. The unleaven bread and green herbs are tasted and distributed. A roasted lamb is placed on the passover table. A second cup

of wine and water is mixed (the cup of deliverance). The meaning of the meal and the events of the passover are explained. The singing of the first part of the Hallel (Psalm 113 and 114:1-8) takes place. The second cup is consumed. The washing of hands again takes place. A prayer of praise is offered. The roasted lamb is then eaten with bitter herbs and unleaven bread dipped in a mixture of fruits (haroseth). The hidden unleaven bread (afikoman) is ransomed with gifts. The middle cake from a stack of three cakes of unleaven bread is broken and distributed. A third cup of wine and water (the cup of blessing) is mixed. A prayer of thanksgiving is recited. The third cup is consumed. A fourth cup of wine and water is mixed (the cup of redemption). The second part of the Hallel, which speaks of messianic restoration, is sung (Psalm 115-118). The drinking of the fourth cup takes place. A song of praise is sung. A waiting for the coming of Elijah ends the feast. The Passover lamb and meal symbolized the redemptive work of the promised Messiah who came "like a lamb to the slaughter" and instituted the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness, strengthening, joy, and union of His believers with Him and each other (Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). 2. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (Shavuot) was celebrated fifty days after Passover or seven weeks after the the Feast of Unleavened Bread in our June. It was a festival of thanksgiving for the wheat harvest. 3. The Feast of Huts or Tabernacles (Succoth) is also called the Feast of Joy in the Torah (Simchat Torah). It was an eight day festival at the time of the grape harvest. For eight days the Israelites would sleep in huts or booths outside their houses to remind themselves of the wilderness journey of their ancestors and their dwelling in tents. The reading of the Torah was completed and begun again during this festival. The three Pilgrimage Feasts or Assembly Festivals were times of great joy and thanksgiving.

The Feast of the New Moon or of Trumpets or of the New Year (Rash Hashanah) was celebrated in our October. It marked the beginning of a new civil year for the Jews. Trumpets (ram horns) were sounded throughout the day. The ram horns reminded the People of the vicarious expiation of Isaac as the ram was sacrificed in his place. Isaac was a type or symbol of the promised Messiah, who is the only Son of God . God's Son, however, was not spared but was sacrificed for the sins of the world (Matthew 26:36-45).

The Feast of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was celebrated during the first full moon of autumn. Humble penance for sins was the theme of this feast. It was a time of fasting, long prayers and Scripture readings, and confession of sins. At this feast the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the Israelite People. He would bath himself and dress in a white, linen tunic. He made a sacrifice of a young bull for his sins and the sins of his family and of a ram as burnt offering. He then sacrificed a goat and a ram for the sins of the people. The blood of all these animals was smeared and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat. On the Day of Atonement, two goats were taken to the entryway to the Tabernacle and Temple. Lots were drawn and one goat was marked for Jehovah and the other for Azazel (for sending away). The goat for Jehovah was the one which was slaughtered by the high priest. He confessed the sins of the Israelite People over the goat for Azazel and it was taken into the wilderness and set free. It was called the scapegoat. It symbolized the mercy of God in that the promised Messiah would be slaughtered for the sins of the world and all who believe in Him are set free from the punishment we deserve because of our sins (Isaiah 53:6, 2 Corinthians 5:21). After the sacrificing of the animals and the sprinkling of the blood on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies, the high priest bathed and was dressed in his high priest vestments. The sacrifices on the Day of Atonement atoned for the sins of the people for one year and had to be repeated each year. The entering of the high priest into the Holy of Holies and the slaying of the animals were types or symbols of the promised Messiah. The Messiah, the eternal High Priest, however, is the sinless Son of God who needed no sacrifice for Himself but went to the Cross and was sacrificed once and for all time to atone for the sins of all people (Hebrews 7:26-28, 9:11-14, 10:8-18).

The establishment of local synagogues is thought to have taken place during the Babylonian Captivity or Exile from 582 to 512 B.C.. The Temple of Solomon was destroyed and many of the Jews were exiles in a foreign land. Without the Temple there could be no sacrifices. The Jewish exiles began to gather for corporate worship without bloody and bloodless sacrifices. Their worship centered in the reading and exposition of the Scriptures and in prayers and praises to God. In the absence of priests and Levites, any Jewish man could read and interpret the Law at these services.

The worship life of the synagogue grew and developed. The order of worship included daily prayers, praise, thanksgiving, and readings from the Torah and the Prophets. The Scrolls of the Law were treated with great reverence and were the center of the synagogue worship. Love for God and His Law as expressed in Psalm 119 was evident among the pious and faithful Jews. The Jewish Talmud developed over the years. The Talmud was a collection of additional, ceremonial laws written by priests and rabbis. It came to be read and discussed at the synagogues in the early Christian centuries. Priority of God in the lives of His people and a life of piety and thanksgiving for God's gifts were the ideals stressed at the synagogue.

In the synagogue service, the versicle, "Blessed are You, O God, giver of the Torah", was said before the reading from the Books of Moses. The reading was interpreted and a lesson from one of the Prophets was read. The Shema, the confession of faith concerning the oneness of God, was recited twice each day in the synagogue and by every pious Jew outside the synagogue. Prayers were prayed in the plural to remember and be comforted by the unity of all the Israelites in the family of God. This was of special comfort for Israelites who were dispersed in other nations. A benediction in praise of God was spoken before and after the recitation of the Shema. Short acts of praise and supplication ended with statements of thanksgiving, "Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth, etc." The singing of Psalms was also prevalent in the synagogue services. The 150 poems of the Psalter are considered the classic of theocratic and monotheistic worship for both Jews and Christians.

When the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile they established synagogues in their local communities. Israelites who were dispersed in other lands retained and established these local houses of worship. The Jewish people would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year in order to celebrate a great feast at the rebuilt Temple. Solomon's Temple, built in 1004 B.C. on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.. The Temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian Exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel's Temple was completed in 515 B.C.. The rebuilt Temple was desecrated by the Syrians who conquered Judea in 198 B.C.. Judas Maccabaeus and his army drove out the Syrians in 166 B.C.. He had the Temple restored in 165 B.C.. The Romans, under the leadership of Pompey, captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C.. The Temple was plundered in 54 B.C. by the Romans. Herod the Great was proclaimed King of Judea in 37 B.C. and began to rebuild the Temple in 19 B.C.. Herod's Temple was not totally completed until 64 A.D. and it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D..

Solomon's Temple was patterned after the Tabernacle but was larger. God gave King David the plans for the Temple and its services (1 Chronicles 22-26, 28). God would not allow David to build a house for Him. The building and dedicating was done during the reign of David's son, Solomon (1 Kings 5-9). The Temple had a porch (Ulam) with two pillars named Jachin and Boaz. The Holy Place (Hekhal) measured 30 by 60 by 45 feet. It contained ten golden lampstands and twelve tables for the twelve loaves of show bread. It also contained a golden altar of incense. A double curtain is said to have separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Devir). The Holy of Holies was a cube measuring 30 by 30 by 30 feet. Two large cherubim plus the Ark of the Covenant with its mercy seat were placed in the Holy of Holies. When the Temple was completed and dedicated, God was pleased with the Temple (1 Kings 8 & 9, 2 Chronicles 5-7).

Later festivals of the Jewish Community are Purim, Dedication, National Mourning and Independence Day. 1. The Feast of Purim was a joyful festival of thanksgiving for the deliverance of the Jews during the exile in Babylon. It takes place in our March. During this festival blessings are spoken for Mordecai and Esther for their deliverance of the Jews and curses are expressed for Haman who attempted to exterminate the Jewish People. Purim means casting lots and speaks of the lots cast by Haman to determine the day of execution of the Jews. The Book of Esther is read at the services on this festival. 2. The Feast of Dedication or Lights (Hanukkah) takes place in our December. It is a memorial of the purifying and dedication of the renovated Temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 B.C.. New sacred vessels and furnishings were constructed and placed in the Temple. The lighting of the Menorah gave light to the Temple and hope to the Jewish People. Tradition says that at the time of this dedication there was only enough oil for one day for the Menorah but that the oil miraculously lasted for eight days. Today a new light is placed in the homes of the Jewish People on each day of this week long celebration. 3. The Day of National Mourning (Teshah-Beab) takes place in our July or August.

It is a day of remembrance of national catastrophes such as the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 BC and of all times of injustice for the Jews. The Book of Lamentations is read in the services on that day. 4. The Day of National Independence, May 14, 1948, and the formation of the present State of Israel is celebrated each year on May 14.

There are two Festival Years of great importance to the People of Israel (Leviticus 25). 1. Every seventh year the Sabbath of the Seventh Year is celebrated. All labor is to cease. The land is to rest and debts are to be forgiven. 2. The Year of Jubilee comes every fiftieth year. It begins with the Great Day of Atonement. All servants are to be freed from their bondage. The land is to be restored to the original owning families. The symbolism is the restoration of God's children and the release from the bondage of sin and its punishment which is given to all who trust in the promised Messiah (John 8:34-36, Galatians 3:26-4:7).

This brief study of the worship life of the Old Testament believers displays the grace of God to His chosen people. In His Word and by means of His worship laws, God called the Old Testament people to know Him and worship Him as the one and only God and as the Creator and Giver of all that is good. Through His Word and the rites and sacrifices at the Tabernacle and Temple on the Sabbath Day and at the Feasts, God came to the people and showed them their sins and His love and atonement for them in the Savior who would come into the world to save all people. In the Books of Moses and the Prophets, God instructed the people in the way of holy and happy living and in the way of faith and salvation in the promised Messiah. His Word and the worship rites and sacrifices displayed His redemptive work in the Savior which set them free from sin, death and eternal damnation. In His Word, God assured the believers that the Messiah would come from their descendants. He assured them that through repentance over their sins and faith in His mercy they were His adopted children and heirs of heaven. This love and salvation of God moved the believers to humbly, joyfully and thankfully worship God, strive to live in His ways and share His grace with one another and other people. May it do the same same for us who have come to see and know the fulfillment of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ and His work of atonement.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above you heavenly hosts,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Reference Books

Holy Bible

Pictorial Bible Dictionary, M. Tenney, Zondervan

Bible History References, Volume 1, F. Rupprecht, Concordia

The Biblical History of the Old Testament, G. Stoeckhardt, Wisdom for Today

Worship, E. Underhill, Crossroad

The Liturgical Year, A. Adam, Pueblo Publishing Company

The Old Testament in the New Testament, R. Tasker, Eerdmans

Worship in the New Testament, C. Moule, John Knox Press

Early Christian Worship, O. Cullmann, SCM Press

Orthodox Worship, B. Williams & H. Anstall, Light & Life Publishing Comp.

Worship In The Early Church, R. Martin, Eerdmans