

- Last week we looked at the fact that God said He did not want to make a King in Israel in the first place, and by doing so Israel was rejecting Him. (1 Samuel 8:1-9) In at least three incidents we read about, The King he makes repeatedly disobeys Him. (1 Samuel 13:8-13) (1 Samuel 14:24-33) (1 Samuel 15), to the point that God said He regrets He made Saul King (1 Samuel 15:11). We talked about whether an all-powerful God can really have regrets, and how God communicates with us in ways we will understand, but that God really doesn't have the same view of time we do. (1 Peter 3:8) and that God is a lot higher than what we can even understand, (Isaiah 55:8-9). We have been given all things we need to know (2 Peter 1:3) and the things we don't need to figure out for our salvation belong to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). We looked at the difference between the Bible and the writing or talking of men (2 Peter 1:16-21) and we looked at how we are in trouble when we worship God the way we want to do it (like Saul did and as many "churches" do today) as opposed to how God want to be worshipped. Paul uses the metaphor of "itching ears" to describe the way that people will want to worship by pleasing themselves (2 Timothy 4:3) Finally we talked about Martin Luther and the Restorationist Movement and how well intentioned their reforms really were but how they ended up in the wrong place, too. (<http://www.history.com/topics/martin-luther-and-the-95-theses>)
- In this lesson, we are going to continue to look at where many worship services today are falling to into the same "itching ears" problem Paul write to Timothy about (2 Timothy 4:3), then we will start into the history of the "400 years of Silence" in the Bible and what happened there, starting with events which were predicted in advance by Daniel (Daniel 2, Daniel 8).
- We talked last week about how there are two approaches to worshipping God – worship Him how He says He wants to be worshiped, or worshipping Him that seems to inspire us the most. The latter approach is just what Paul warns Timothy about. (2 Timothy 4:3)
- Remember that we talked about how the old style of worship was "spectator" based, with priests performing rituals and the people watching. We talked about how under the new covenant everyone is worship is "involved," with us working out our own salvation ourselves. (Philippians 2:12)
- Two things are indisputable – God has told us very clearly that we are to worship Him with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28) and in spirit and truth (John 4:24).
- God's nature is to have people focus on Him by clearing away all distractions. A great example is found in Deuteronomy 12 when God has Israel destroy all their idols, worship poles, altars, pillars, etc. and even to purge them from their memory. God knows anything that even could distract us from worship of Him alone (in spirit) needs to be removed completely.
- Thinking people will have disagreements about what constitutes appropriate worship of God in spirit and in truth. We will probably never agree 100% on everything that constitutes a distraction in worship, but we worship together with people who mostly agree with our approach. This is NOT an excuse not to try as best we can and it is NOT okay

when our friends ask us why we worship a certain way to hide behind our parents, the elders, our teachers, tradition, or anyone or anything else. We are old enough now to all read, study and do our own thinking, and it is our responsibility to do so. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

- Even though there are no clear commandments under the new covenant about how to worship like there were under the Old Covenant, there are things we do because we find scriptural examples for them. Many will depart from scripture, essentially “picking and choosing” what to believe in and what they believe to be historical. Some of these are listed below.
- We do not use instruments in music in our worship. Instruments were used in the Old Law to encourage and inspire when worship was a “spectator” based system, but we do not find their use by any church in the New Testament. In fact, anytime the word “song” is used in the New Testament, it means from within, from the heart. (Ephesians 5:19) This is because God knew instruments were a distraction from the new system of worship which is “involvement.”
- Yet holy “entertainment”, a return to a “spectator” based worship style has become a guiding concept for a lot of folks. These days it's common for churches to have what amounts to a rock band that plays rock music for worship. These people are often dressed in a worldly manner, playing their instruments in the worldly way, and playing songs with a worldly style. Some churches even have the sanctuary darkened, and have various multi-colored stage lights shining on the band, fog machines running, LCD screens flashing multimedia images, and the music turned up very loudly. Some have invested a lot of money for such state-of-the-art systems. (<http://en-seekingthelord.blogspot.com/2015/07/avoiding-worldly-worship.html>) To us, that is a very clear example of the “itching ears” illustration Paul writes about.
- Even our prayers can be a source of distraction if they are not done from the heart, but just done to be heard by men. (Matthew 6:5-8)
- The role of women in worship is an area in which many churches differ from the way we do things. In this case the Bible is clear that in the public worship women are not to have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:8-15). Different people have different notions of what authority and silence mean. Paul seems to be instructing Timothy on how to keep the worship service orderly. In context, we don't take it to mean women must be completely silent “spectators” – women sing and teach for example. We take the passage to mean that women can teach men who are not yet baptized. Some folks use passages like (Galatians 3:28) to try to justify positions to the contrary. In that case, the passage is taken clearly out of context – that passage is talking about who can be saved. Anyone who uses one passage to try to invalidate another is taking something out of context. The Bible will never contradict itself.
- Communion is another good example. Many “worldly” churches have communion once a month or even less often. The only example we have in the New Testament is of churches doing this weekly. In fact, it seems to have been the reason they assembled. (Acts 20:7)

- We will turn our attention to history now, specifically what happened in the 400-year period between Malachi and Matthew. Why does this period exist? Why didn't God send Jesus right away? [Galatians 4:4-5](#) gives us a clue. It says "in the fullness of time" which indicates God knew exactly the right time to send His Son. As we study the 400 years of silence and what happened then, we will find out exactly why the events which occurred then laid the groundwork for the successful spread of the Gospel.
- Today we are going to study the Persian empire, it's accomplishments which would later help spread the Gospel, and the fall of the Persian empire.
- The "last three" prophets represented by the last three books of our Old Testament probably lived around the time of Nehemiah, or shortly thereafter. It was around the 6th-5th Century B.C. They are all buried together:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_of_the_Prophets_Haggai,_Zechariah_and_Malachi.
- The remaining Jews who had not gone home but were still enslaved in Babylon were there when it was conquered by the Persian empire under Darius the Mede ([Daniel 5:24-30](#)).
- Darius made Daniel one of three chiefs of staff. ([Daniel 5:1-4](#))
- The King Darius was the son of a man named Ahasueras ([Daniel 9:1](#)) who was the guy who was King during Esther's time and would eventually become her husband. ([Esther 1 and 2](#))
- Some scholars content that Ahasuerus is the same person as Xerxes I (485-464 B.C.). Others make a strong argument for Ahaseuras being the son of Xerxes I. In ancient societies, kings sometimes were known by more than one name, especially if they reigned in a community in which more than one language was widely spoken.
<http://www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/p213.htm>
- This is significant because, either way, this was the same King who Nehemiah petitioned to return home. When he asked the King, the Jewish Esther is right beside the King. ([Nehemiah 2:1-8](#)).
- He is also the same King that tried to invade Greece and before having to withdraw after eventually outflanked the Spartans at the pass at Thermopylae – a event which you may have seen in the movie 300. That was in 480 B.C.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae
- Under Darius, Daniel had several visions or interpretations of others dreams of the Persian Kingdom's eventual demise ([Daniel 2](#), [Daniel 7](#)).
- After Darius' death, Darius son, another Xerxes ruled and was eventually defeated by the Greeks in 330 B.C. who started the next empire of their own.
<https://sites.google.com/a/jeffcoschools.us/ancient-persia-dreier-lyons/reasons-for-its-decline-and-fall>
- The Persian empire established certain elements for the first time that would later help with the spread of Christianity. They began to establish respect for the law: the first ever bill of rights, the religious equality and freedom and the first form of paper money were the Persian Empire contribution to the modern world. They had a fixed legal system and a constitution of a nation. <http://www.persianempires.com/persian-empire-accomplishments-achievements-contributions.html> They also used tactics like mounted

riders ([Esther 8:10](#)) to improve communication significantly.

<https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/pt-br/node/43>

- The Greeks, who eventually conquered the Persians, had been through several decades of war between city states with famous name like Athens, Macedon, Syracuse, and Sparta. Culminating in an event known as the Peloponnesian War.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War
- Eventually Macedon wins, unites the Greek nation, and a ruling family emerges. This culminates in a king we know as Alexander the Great. He was tutored by a guy we know as Aristotle and eventually not only conquers Persia but established an empire like one the world has not seen to this point. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

Questions:

1. What are two approaches to the worship of God?
2. What is the appropriate approach? How do we know that?
3. What are the differences between spectator based worship and involved worship?
4. What two things are indisputable about the way God tells us to worship?
5. Why are distractions in worship such a concern?
6. Are we ever going to completely agree on how to worship?
7. What is our individual responsibility with respect to worship?
8. In the absence of direct commandments for how to worship, how do we decide what the “right” approaches for worship are?
9. Why do we not use instruments in worship?
10. How can prayers be a distraction?
11. What is the proper role for women in worship? How do we know?
12. Why do we take communion each Sunday?
13. Why does the 400-year period between Malachi and Matthew even exist?
14. Who were Darius and Ahasuerus (Xerxes 1 or Artaxerxes)?
15. Who foresees the demise of the Persian empire?
16. Who eventually defeated the Persian empire?
17. Name some of the major accomplishments of the Persian empire.
18. What was the Peloponnesian War?
19. Who was Alexander the Great?