

ONE GOD

THE WAYS
WE WORSHIP
HIM

By
Florence Mary Fitch

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THIS BOOK
IS FOR
MY STUDENTS
AND
THEIR BOYS AND GIRLS

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WHY WE WORSHIP GOD

Why do people go to church? Why do they read the Bible? Why do they pray?

The need of worship is no new thing. Ever since there have been men, they have felt themselves dependent on some power greater than themselves and have worshipped that power. In primitive times their place of worship was a high rock, a mighty tree, a little cave or a tent. Early primitive peoples thought there were many gods, who protected them and helped them fight their enemies. But now we know there is only one God; there never has been any other, and all men are searching to find and to understand the one God.

For thousands of years men have prayed, to praise God for all His goodness, to find hope and comfort when they are sad, security when they are anxious, courage when they are weak. And for thousands of years God has answered, making them conscious of His presence as a Father more ready to give than they are to receive.

But even though they all worship one God, all people do not worship in just the same way. In America each person may make his own choice. Freedom of religion is one of the rights of free men. But most people follow the religion of their parents. There are many people who do not pay much attention to religion, but all are influenced by it, for they live in a country which was founded on faith in God.

It is not possible to present a universally true picture of religious observances, for customs vary in different communities and in different homes. This book describes the ways of worship which are usual among the majority of Jews, Catholics and Protestants — the traditional ways in which they worship the one God.

ONE GOD

THE WAYS WE WORSHIP HIM

*"Have we not all one Father?
Hath not one God created us?"
Malachi 11:10*



THE JEWISH WAY

The first people to understand that there is only one God and to set aside one day every week regularly for special worship of Him were the Jews.

Jews live in almost every country of the world — in America, in France, in Russia and even in China. The reasons for this are found in the long and very interesting history of the Jews. It begins with Abraham, the first person to be called a Hebrew. From a small tribe inhabiting Palestine, the Hebrews, who are thought to be descendants of Noah's son, Shem, and therefore Semites, grew and expanded. They migrated to Egypt and prospered until an ambitious king made them slaves. Then, under their great leader and teacher, Moses, who gave them their laws and government, they went back to Palestine. After many years of troubles, strife and battles, they were victorious in establishing themselves there. They became a great nation, which reached the height of its glory under King Solomon. But then the Hebrew nation was divided into two kingdoms — the kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Samaria, and the kingdom of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem. This is why the same people, originally called Hebrews, are sometimes called Israelites, and today are generally called Jews, from Judah.

After the division of the nation, there followed a long period of strife. Sometimes the Jews were victorious, as under Judah Maccabee; more often, because they were disunited, they were defeated. In the year 70, the Romans finally conquered the Jews and destroyed Jerusalem. The Jews no longer had a country and they dispersed throughout the world.

But a wonderful thing happened. Instead of forgetting their laws and customs, they loved them more than ever. In their

family life and their ways of worship they would follow the old established customs, generation after generation. Though in all other ways Jews conform to the life of the country which is their home, they have held on throughout the ages to their own religion, their own way of worshipping the one God.

THE SABBATH

According to the ancient tradition of the Jews, God created the heavens and the earth, the sea and all living things in six days and rested on the seventh. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. So they observe this holy day as a day of rest and of praise to God, the Creator of the world.

For them, more than for any other people, religion is bound up with the family life. This is seen in their observance of the Sabbath.

All Jewish holy days begin and end at sunset, because in olden times, before there were clocks, people told time by the sun. So the Sabbath begins with the coming of evening on Friday, and a good part of the day is spent preparing for it. Enough food is bought and cooked so that no cooking will be necessary on the Sabbath. The house is given a special cleaning and the mother or servant is busy preparing the soup, fish and chicken. Sometimes they bake the bread, the Hallah, at home, cutting the dough into strips and braiding it into the special shape of the Sabbath loaves.

The delicious smells of the cooking and baking in the kitchen make the children more eager for the coming of the Sabbath, the day that crowns the week. They have their work too. They help clean the house and set the table for the Sabbath meal. They put the best linen cloth on the table, arrange the flowers and polish the silver. They place the two heavy brass or silver candlesticks, the engraved silver kiddush cup filled with wine, and the two twisted loaves of Hallah, covered with a snowy white embroidered cloth. At last everything is ready and the mother lights the candles. This is the age-old ceremony that ushers in the Sabbath. She



stands silently before the table for a few moments, then she spreads her hands above the flames and holds them before her face as she prays, first in Hebrew, the ancient language of her people, then in English:

“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe
Who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments
And commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.”

Then almost silently she adds, “May our home be consecrated, O God, by thy Light.”

The family watches for the father's return from the service at the synagogue and wonders whom he will bring with him. In olden times whenever a Jew found himself in a strange town on Sabbath eve, he could be certain that some one in the synagogue would invite him home to share his family meal, and the Jewish people have always been famous for their hospitality.

The children rush to meet their father, greeting him with “Good Sabbath.” As soon as the men have washed their hands, saying a little blessing as they do so, the family gathers in the living room and sings a greeting to the Sabbath:

“Welcome Sabbath Angels
Angels of Peace.”

Then the father reads from the Proverbs the praise of women, as a special honor to his own wife. The children stand before him and he lays his hand upon each head and blesses them one by one. After this the family goes to the dining room.

At the table the father lifts the cup of wine and pronounces the Kiddush, the Sabbath Prayer. He pours off a “cup of blessing,” a small portion of wine, for each member of the family. Everyone washes his hands and then a blessing is said; they sit down and the meal is served.

The family may be poor; the food may be scanty; the week's work may have been hard; but as a rabbi said long ago, “The