

## Worship

### *Worship of God*

#### **WORSHIP**

Reverent devotion and allegiance pledged to God; the rituals or ceremonies by which this reverence is expressed. The English word worship comes from the Old English word *worthship*, a word which denotes the worthiness of the one receiving the special honor or devotion.

In Old Testament times Abraham built altars to the Lord and called on His name (Gen 12:8; 13:18). This worship of God required no elaborate priesthood or ritual.

After God's appearance to Moses and the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the foundations of Israelite ritual were laid. This worship took place in the light of history, especially the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt. Through Moses, God established the form and principles of Israelite worship (Ex 25-31; 35:1-40:38).

After the occupation of the Promised Land, Israel's exposure to Canaanite worship affected the nation's own worship. The Old Testament reveals clearly that Israel adopted some of the practices of the pagan people around them. At various times God's people lapsed into idolatry. Some idols were placed on pedestals and sometimes they were adorned or fastened with silver chains (Isa 40:19) or fastened with pegs lest they totter and fall (Isa 41:7).

Shrines and altars were sometimes erected to these pagan gods. But such idolatry was condemned by God and His special spokesmen, the **PROPHETS** of the Old Testament.

New Testament worship was characterized by a joy and thanksgiving because of God's gracious redemption in Christ. This early Christian worship focused on God's saving work in Jesus Christ. True worship was that which occurred under the inspiration of God's Spirit (John 4:23-24; Phil 3:3).

The Jewish Sabbath was quickly replaced by the first day of the week as the time for weekly public worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2); it was called the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10). This was the occasion for celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, since He arose on the first day of the week (Mark 16:2).

At first worship services were conducted in private houses. Possibly for a time the first Christians worshiped in the synagogues as well as private homes. Some scholars believe the Jewish Christians would go to the synagogues on Saturday and to their own meeting on Sunday.

Many early Christians of Jewish background continued to follow the law and customs of their people. They observed the Sabbath and the Jewish holy days, such as the great annual festivals. However, the apostle Paul held himself free from any obligation to these and never laid an obligation to observe them on his converts (Col 2:16). The New Testament itself contains no references to any yearly Christian festivals. The KJV mention of Easter (Acts 12:4) is a mistranslation; the NKJV has Passover.

Although the New Testament does not instruct worshipers in a specific procedure to follow in their services, several elements appear regularly in the worship practices of the early church.

Prayer apparently had a leading place in Christian worship. The letters of Paul regularly open with references to prayer for fellow-Christians who are instructed to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). Praise, either by individuals or in hymns sung in common, reflects the frequent use of psalms in the synagogue. Also, possible fragments of Christian hymns appear scattered through the New Testament (Acts 4:24-30; Eph 5:14; 1 Tim 3:16; Rev 4:8,11; 5:9-10,12-13).

Lessons from the Bible to be read and studied were another part of the worship procedure of the New Testament church. Emphasis was probably given to the messianic prophecies which had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. His teachings also received a primary place. Prophecy, inspired preaching by one filled with the Holy Spirit, helped build up the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 12:6). Contributions were also collected on the first day of each week (1 Cor 16:2). Other details about the worship procedures of the early Christians in the New Testament times are spotty. But these elements must have been regularly included in the weekly worship service.

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## **WORSHIP**

The act of paying honor to a deity; religious reverence and homage. The rendering of the following Heb. and Gk. words:

1. Heb. *shaha* (to "bow down"), to prostrate oneself before another in order to do him honor and reverence (Gen 22:5; etc.). This mode of salutation consisted in falling upon the knees and then touching the forehead to the ground (19:1; 42:6; 48:12; 1 Sam 25:41; etc., often rendered "bowed"). It is, however, used specifically to bow down before God; spoken of worship rendered to God, and also to false gods (Gen 22:5; Ex 24:1; 33:10; Judg 7:15; Job 1:20; Ps 22:27; 86:9).

2. Aram. *segid* (to "fall down"), spoken of in connection with idol worship; to fall down in adoration of idols (Dan 3:5-6,10-12,14-15,28); in honor of a man, as of Daniel (Dan 2:46).

3. Heb. *'asab* (to "carve, labor"), to serve an idol, as in Jer 44:19; or according to others, to fashion her, i.e., the image (see Orelli, Com., ad loc.).

4. The Gk. words thus rendered are: *proskuneo*, properly to "kiss the hand to (toward) one," in token of reverence; also by kneeling or prostration to do homage-the word most frequently used in the NT; *sebomai*, to "revere" a deity (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 18:13; 19:27). Proselytes of the gate are called worshipers of God (*sebomene ton theon*, 16:14; 18:7), or simply "devout persons" (*tois sebomenois*, 17:17, "God-fearing"). *latreuo* (to "serve") in the NT means to render religious service or honor and in the strict sense to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God in the observance of the rites instituted for His worship (Heb 10:2; 9:9). *Ethelothreskeia* ("voluntary worship"), i.e., worship that one devises and prescribes for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of the faith that ought to be directed to Christ; used for the misdirected zeal and practices of ascetics (Col 2:23). *Therapeuo* to "do service," as in Acts 17:25.

**General Observations.** It is as natural to worship as it is to live. The feeling and expression of high adoration, reverence, trust, love, loyalty, and dependence upon a higher power, human or divine, is a necessity to man. These sentiments, toward something or somebody, and whether real or imaginary, appeal to a greater or less degree to every man. And that something determines his worship. "Worship is as old as humanity. It has its root in a necessity of the human soul as native to it as the consciousness of God itself, which impels it to testify by word and act its love and gratitude to the Author of life and the Giver of all good" (Keil, Bib. Arch., p. 55).

**Primitive Worship.** We are not informed as to the nature of the worship rendered by our first parents. But we learn from earliest records that their sons were moved to present a portion of the product of their labor in sacrifice to God. Men as early as Enosh, the grandson of Adam (Gen 4:26), called upon the name of the Lord. In other words, the regular and solemn worship of God as Jehovah (i.e., as the God of salvation) was celebrated in word and act-with prayer and sacrifice. Max Muller says: "That feeling of sonship which distinguishes man from every other creature, and not only exalts him above the brute, but completely secures him against sinking into a purely physical state of being, that original

intuition of God, and that consciousness of his being dependent upon a higher power, can only be the result of a primitive revelation in the most literal sense of the word." This view is held by Schelling. The other view is that worship cannot be traced to a divine source; that the original condition of the human family was of an extremely rude and imperfect character; and that fetishism, being the lowest form of religion, was also the earliest and that for this reason we ought to regard religion, even in its most advanced forms, as springing originally from a barbarous fetishism. But the grounds upon which this opinion is based are weak in the extreme. "It would be nearer the truth to say that they are as divine as they are human in their origin, seeing that they are based upon the relation of man to God involved in his creation, and are evoked by a sense of the divine training and guidance under which he finds himself after his creation" (Keil, Bib. Arch., p. 56).

In primitive times the form of worship that Enosh introduced was still maintained, for Enoch "walked with God" (Gen 5:24). Noah was righteous before Him, expressing his gratitude by presenting burnt offerings (6:9; 8:20-21).

In a subsequent age God chose for Himself a faithful servant in the person of Abraham. He made him the depository of His revelation and the father and founder of His chosen people, who were destined to preserve the knowledge and worship of His name until the time when the Savior would come from their midst. While other nations multiplied their modes of worship according to the political constitution that they adopted and to suit the number and variety of their duties, they devised a corresponding variety of ritual, with a large priesthood and a multitude of sacred observances. But Abraham and the posterity born to him preserved a simple form of worship, as became shepherds and in keeping with the revelation imparted to them. Wherever they pitched their tents for any length of time they built altars in order that, in compliance with ancient usage, they might call upon the name of the Lord (12:7-8; 13:4, 18; etc.). Those altars were, doubtless, simple mounds (Heb. bamot) composed of earth and stone, and the animals sacrificed upon them consisted of those that were edible (i.e., clean), taken from the fold.

We have no information regarding the particular ceremonies observed in connection with these sacrifices. But it is probable that prayer was offered by the patriarchs in person, who were in the habit of discharging the priestly functions. The offerings were for the most part burnt offerings, i.e., offerings that were entirely consumed upon the altar, although instances are given of a portion of the sacrifice being reserved for use in the sacrificial feasts. In the selection of animals for sacrifices the patriarchs were probably guided by the directions given to Abraham (15:9); the way in which the sacrifice of Isaac terminated (22:12-13) must have shown that the animal sacrificed was to be regarded merely as a symbol of the heart's devotion to God. Whether these sacrifices were offered at regular intervals or on special occasions (see Job 1:5), we cannot say.

Besides altars, memorial stones (Heb. massebot) were erected by the patriarchs on spots where God had favored them with special revelations. Drink offerings were poured upon them (Gen 28:18,22; 35:14). The narrative of Jacob's vow (2:20-22) tells of his promise that, if God would watch over him, supply his wants, and bring him back in safety, he would acknowledge Jehovah as his God, consecrate the pillar he had set up and make it a house of God, and render to Jehovah a tenth of all his income. He excluded strange gods from his house (35:1-4). After due preparation on the part of his household, he built an altar at Bethel.

To the above-mentioned forms of worship, the rite of circumcision was added. In obedience to a divine order, and as a token of the covenant that Jehovah made with him, Abraham performed this rite upon himself and the male members of his household, commanding his posterity that it was an inviolable obligation (Gen 17:1-14,23-27). Nothing further is known regarding the forms of worship that prevailed among the patriarchs.

**Mosaic.** When Israel became a nation with an organized civil government, in order to fulfill its divine mission it was necessary that its religious affairs should also be remodeled and that the character and style of its worship should be fixed and regulated by positive divine enactments. This did not necessitate an entirely new system of worship, since they were to serve and honor the God of their fathers. Therefore the worship introduced by Moses was grafted on that of Israel's ancestors. It was improved and perfected only as the circumstances of the Israelites as a confederacy of tribes or a monarchy seemed to require, with such forms and ceremonies as would further Israel's divinely appointed mission. This object was further secured by the Mosaic ritual, inasmuch as it embraced all the essential elements of a complete system of worship. It gave precise directions as to the place of worship, with its structure and arrangements, instituting a distinct order of sacred functions, prescribing the religious ceremonies, fixing the sacred seasons and the manner in which they were to be observed.

This system bore the stamp of genuine worship. It was framed by Moses in accordance with revelation and recognized Jehovah as the true God. Nor is it a vital objection to its being true worship on the grounds that it had a material and sensuous character and that many of its forms and ceremonies were similar to the rituals of pagan religions. These facts have been variously misconstrued and have been taken advantage of for the purpose of disparaging the origin and character of the Mosaic worship. It is true that the Mosaic worship embodies itself, for the most part, in outward forms and ceremonies, for one can only give expression to his relation to his Creator through corporeal media. Religious thought and feeling can express themselves only in word and act, and therefore forms are necessary in every kind of worship. And being copies or impressions of religious ideas, they must have an allegorical or symbolical character.

Further, the religion of the OT is monotheism, in contradiction to the polytheism of heathen nations. Jehovah is represented not only as the only true God, not merely as the almighty Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world and every creature; not simply as the eternal, absolute Spirit, the good and merciful One who has destined man to enjoy the felicity of life that springs from personal fellowship with Himself. But He is also pictured as the omnipresent and near One watching over all His creatures, to keep the weak and distressed. He seeks to conduct those who have wandered from Him back to the fountain of life. He selected for Himself, from degenerate humanity, a race to be in a special sense His people and to whom He, in a special sense, would be God, with the purpose of saving the world. This is accompanied with such directions for the regulations of their life, that, if accepted and complied with, Israel would become to Jehovah "My own possession among all the peoples" (Ex 19:5-6), "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

**Christian.** The church of Christ is not only His representative body on earth, it is also the temple of divine service continuing and perfecting the worship of the past. This service includes offerings presented to God and blessings received from Him. The former embraces the entire ordinance of worship, with its nature, reasons, and observances; the latter embraces the means of grace, common prayer, the Word, and the sacraments. These, however, are really one, and their relations to each other as one are of great importance. Both require for their realization the institution of the evangelical ministry. The worship of the Christian church may be regarded in its divine principles and in its human arrangements. As to the former, its object is the revealed Trinity; its form is mediatorial, through the incarnate Son, by the Holy Spirit; its attributes are spirituality, simplicity, purity, and reverent decorum; its seasons are preeminently the Lord's Day and all times of holy assembly. As to the latter, it is left to the congregation itself to determine the minor details, according to the pattern shown in the Scripture.

As an institute of worship the church of Christ has its ordinary channels for the communication of the influences of the Holy Spirit to the souls of men, namely, the means of

grace; the supreme means are the Word and prayer. Special attention is also called to the sacraments (which see) of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

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**OT:7812**

shachah (shaw-khaw'); a primitive root; to depress, i.e. prostrate (especially reflexive, in homage to royalty or God):

**KJV - bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship.**

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**NT:4352**

proskuneo (pros-koo-neh'-o); from NT:4314 and a probable derivative of NT:2965 (meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand); to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore):

**KJV - worship.**

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**NT:4352**

proskuneoo, proskunoo;

a. of homage shown to men of superior rank: absolutely, **Matt 20:20**

b. of homage rendered to God and the ascended Christ, to heavenly beings, and to demons: **John 4:20**

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