

# BACK TO BIBLE STUDY

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***Objective: What is worship, and how is it expressed in the life of the believer?***

***God is worthy of honor and praise***

The English word “worship” refers to attributing worth, value and respect to someone.

The Hebrew and Greek words translated into English as worship are many, but the main ones contain a basic idea of service or duty, such as a slave displays towards a master. They express the thought that God alone is Lord over every aspect of life, as is illustrated in Christ’s reply to Satan in Luke 4:8, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve’” (Luke 4:8; Matthew 4:10; Deuteronomy 10:20).

Other concepts include sacrifice, bowing down, offering, confession, homage, devotion, etc. “The essence of divine worship is giving – our giving to God what is due Him” (Barackman 1981: 417).

Christ said that the hour is now “when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

The above passage suggests that worship is directed to the Father, and that it is an integral part of the believer’s life. Just as God is Spirit, so our worship will not solely be physical but also involve our very being and be founded on truth (note that Jesus, the Word, is truth – see John 1:1, 14; 14:6; 17:17).

All of the life of faith is responsive worship, loving “the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). True worship reflects the depth of Mary’s words, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46).

“Worship is the total life of the church through which the community of faith says Amen (So be it!) through the power of the Holy Spirit to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jenkins 2001:229)

Thus whatever a believer does is an opportunity for grateful worship. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17; see also 1 Corinthians 10:31).

**Reflection**

**In what ways does your soul magnify the Lord?**

***Jesus Christ and worship***

The passage above notes that we give thanks through Jesus Christ. As Jesus, the Lord who “is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17), is our Mediator and Advocate, our worship flows to the Father through Him.

Worship does not require human intermediaries such as priests because through Christ’s death humanity has been reconciled to God and through Him has “access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:14-18). This teaching is the original context of Martin Luther’s notion of “the priesthood of all believers”.

“...the church worships God inasmuch as it participates in the perfect worship (leiturgia)

that Christ offers God *on our behalf*' (Jinkins 2001:229).

Jesus Christ received worship at key events in His life. One was in celebration of His birth (Matthew 2:11) when the angels and shepherds rejoiced (Luke 2:13-14, 20), and another was at His resurrection (Matthew 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52). Also throughout His ministry people worshipped Him in response to His interaction with them (Matthew 8:2, 9:18, 14:33; Mark 5:6, etc). Revelation 5:12 proclaims "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain", referring to Christ.

### Reflection

**How does Jesus function as a mediator in your life?**

**Does the New Testament worship of Christ suggest a pattern for modern worship events?**

#### *Collective worship in the Old Testament*

"One generation shall praise Your works to another, and declare your mighty acts...they shall utter the memory of your goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness" (Psalm 145:4-7).

The custom of collective praise and worship is firmly rooted in the biblical tradition.

Although there are instances of individual sacrifices and homage, and also of pagan cultic activity, there is no clear pattern of collective worship of the true God before the establishment of Israel as a nation. Moses' request of Pharaoh that the Israelites may be permitted to hold a feast to God is among the first indications of a call to collective worship (Exodus 5:1).

On their way to the Promised Land Moses prescribed certain festival days that the Israelites were to observe physically. These are noted in Exodus 23, Leviticus 23 and elsewhere, and in meaning looked back in

commemoration of Israel's exodus from Egypt and of their wilderness experience. For example, the Festival of Tabernacles was instituted so that the generations of Israelites would know that God "made the children of Israel dwell in booths" when He brought them out of the land of Egypt (Leviticus 23:43).

That the observance of these holy convocations (gatherings) did not represent to the Israelites a closed annual worship calendar is clear by the scriptural facts that, later in Israelite history, two additional yearly celebrations of national deliverance were added. One was Purim, a time of "joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday" (Esther 8:17; also John 5:1 refers possibly to Purim). The other was the winter Feast of Dedication. It lasted eight days beginning on the 25<sup>th</sup> Chislev (December) on the Hebrew calendar, and celebrated through displays of light the cleansing of the temple and victory over Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 BC<sup>1</sup>. Jesus Himself, "the light of the world", was present at the temple on that day (John 1:9; 9:5; 10:22-23).

Also, various fasting days were proclaimed in appointed months (Zechariah 8:19), and New Moons were observed (Ezra 3:5, etc).

There were daily and weekly public ordinances, rituals and sacrifices. The weekly Sabbath was a commanded "holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:3), the sign of the Old Covenant (Exodus 31:12-18) between God and the Israelites, and also a gift from God for their rest and benefit (16:29-30). Along with the Levitical holy days the Sabbath was regarded as part of the Old Covenant (Exodus 34:10-28).

The temple was another significant factor in the development of Old Testament worship patterns. Jerusalem with its temple became the central place to which believers would travel to observe the various festivals. "I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast" (Psalm 42:4; see also 1

Chronicles 23:27-32; 2 Chronicles 8:12-13; John 12:12; Acts 2:5-11, etc).

Full participation in public worship was restricted in the Old Testament. Within the temple precincts women and children were typically not allowed into the main court of worship. Emasculated men and those born out of wedlock were prohibited, and various ethnic groups such as the Moabites were disallowed “forever” from the assembly (Deuteronomy 23:1-8). Interestingly, in analyzing the meaning of the Hebrew concept of “forever”, Jesus is descended on His mother’s side from a Moabite woman called Ruth (Luke 3: 32; Matthew 1:5).

### Reflection

**How did worship in the Old Testament help establish a national identity for Israel?**

#### *Collective worship in the New Testament*

There are distinct differences between the Old and New Testaments concerning holiness in relation to worship.

As has been noted, in the Old Testament certain places, times and people were regarded as more holy and therefore more relevant for worship practices than others.

With the New Testament, however, from a holiness and worship perspective, we go from Old Covenant exclusivity to New Testament inclusiveness; from specific places, times and people to all places, times and people.

For example, the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple were holy places “where one ought to worship” (John 4:20) whereas Paul instructs that men ought to pray not just in assigned Old Testament or Jewish places of worship, but “everywhere, lifting up holy hands”, a practice associated with the sanctuary of the temple (1 Timothy 2:8; Psalm 134:2).

In the New Testament church assemblies take place in people’s homes, in upper rooms, by the banks of rivers, by the edges of lakes, on mountain slopes, in schools, etc. Preaching occurred everywhere (Mark 16:20). Believers have become the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:15-17), and they meet wherever the Spirit leads them to assemble.

As for Old Testament sacred times such as “a festival or a new moon or sabbaths”, these represent “a shadow of things to come”, the reality of which is of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). Thus the concept of special times falls away in the fullness of Christ.

There is freedom in choosing worship times according to individual, congregational and cultural input. “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). In the New Testament assemblies take place at various times. Church unity was expressed in the believers’ lives in Jesus through the Holy Spirit, not in traditions and calendars.

Regarding people, in the Old Testament only the nation of Israel constituted God’s holy people. In the New Testament everyone everywhere is invited to be part of God’s spiritual holy nation (1 Peter 2:9-10).

From the New Testament we learn that no place is holier than any other, no time holier than any other, and no people holier than any other. And we learn that God, who is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35), is also not a respecter of times and places.

In the New Testament the practice of assembling together is actively encouraged (Hebrews 10:25).

Much is written in the epistles about what happens in church assemblies. “Let all things be done for edification” says Paul, and “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:26, 40).

The main features of collective worship included the preaching of the word (Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2), praise and thanksgiving (Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:18), praying for the gospel and each other (Colossians 4:2-4; James 5:16), sharing news of the gospel work (Acts 14:27), and giving for the needs of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Philippians 4:15-17).

Special worship events included commemorating the sacrifice of Christ. Just before His death Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper by changing completely the Old Testament Passover ritual. Instead of using the obvious idea of the lamb to indicate His body slain for us, He chose to use bread broken for us. In addition, to represent His blood shed for us, He introduced the idea of wine, which had no part in the Passover ritual. He redeemed the Old Testament Passover service into a New Covenant worship practice so that as often as we eat the bread and drink the wine we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:26).

Worship is not just about words and actions of praise and homage toward God. It is also about our attitude towards others. Thus going to worship without a spirit of reconciliation is inappropriate (Matthew 5:23-24).

Worship is physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It involves all of our life. We offer ourselves as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God", which is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

### Reflection

**Compare worship in the Old Testament with worship in the New.**

**In what ways does New Testament worship inform your practice in your local congregation?**

### Conclusion

Worship is a declaration of the worthiness and glory of God, expressed through the life of the believer and through his or her participation in the fellowship of believers.

### Bibliography

From the WCG website:

<http://wcg.org/lit/AboutUs/beliefs/worship.htm>

“Worship is the divinely created response to the glory of God. It is motivated by divine love and springs from God's revelation of himself in communion with his creation. In worship, believers commune with God the Father through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Worship involves humbly and joyfully giving God priority in all things and is expressed in such actions and attitudes as prayer, praise, celebration, generosity, acts of mercy, and repentance. (John 4:23; 1 John 4:19; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17; Romans 5:8-11; 12:1; Hebrews 12:28; 13:15-16)”

See WCG literature on:

<http://wcg.org/lit/spiritual/worship/index.htm>

Barackman, Floyd H. 1981, reprinted 1992. *Practical Christian Theology*. USA: Kregel Publications.

Jenkins, Michael. 2001. *Invitation to Theology*. USA: InterVarsity Press.

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<sup>i</sup> This is noted in 2 Maccabees 10:6