

Recalling the Hope of Glory deals expertly and thoroughly with worship in the Bible. What is most refreshing: it is not at all ideological. It contains no worship-war polemics, but just sets forth straightforwardly what the Bible says. People of all persuasions will find it valuable as a reference work. It also gives us a large perspective on worship that is likely to moderate the current discussion.

—JOHN M. FRAME

Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy,
Reformed Theological Seminary

Ross presents an in-depth analysis of biblical wisdom about worship from the book of origins to the anthem of the redeemed around the throne of the Lamb in glory. Along the way stereotypes are exploded, assumptions challenged, as the awesome, tri-personal God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is shown to be the true object of all creaturely confession, adoration, and praise. This is not only a study of worship; it is a book designed to lead Christian believers into worship. I commend it heartily to God’s people everywhere.

—TIMOTHY GEORGE

Dean and Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School
Executive Editor, *Christianity Today*

This is a book that needed to be written a long time ago. *Recalling the Hope of Glory* is instructive, setting forth the biblical teaching on worship; practical, challenging the church to properly integrate biblical teaching into contemporary worship issues; and inspirational, bringing the reader to a posture and place of worship. This book should become foundational for the church.

—DAVID TALLEY

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology,
Talbot School of Theology

Allen Ross takes his readers back to the Bible itself to paint a colorful picture of worship that is spiritually vibrant, theologically sound, and focused on Christ. His passion for worship that glorifies God and his thorough knowledge of Scripture are obvious throughout. For the western church, which needs desperately to recover its biblical and theological roots, this book will be an extremely helpful resource.

—DANIEL I. BLOCK

Professor of Old Testament,
Wheaton College

It is remarkable that so many books about worship have so little to say about God. This book is a welcome exception. Through its patient reflection on specific biblical texts and themes, the book evokes a vivid awareness of the God of glory. By developing the theme of glory, the book hones a vision of worship that is at once luminous, transcendent, and inexhaustible.

—JOHN D. WITVLIET
Director, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
Professor of Worship, Theology, and Music,
Calvin College

Stunning in scope, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* provides a historical-theological study of worship from creation to the new creation. The logic of Allen Ross's ranging exposition across the flow of biblical history will challenge every reader and grace every church, regardless of tradition. Here is dazzling substance for recovery of robust worship of our sovereign and holy triune God. Sure to be a standard work.

—R. KENT HUGHES
Pastor, College Church in Wheaton
Series Editor, Preaching the Word commentary series

The publication of *Recalling the Hope of Glory* is a splendid addition to the growing number of works on biblical worship. Not only is this work a comprehensive theological vision of creation, incarnation, and re-creation, it is also a genuine work of praise.

—ROBERT E. WEBBER
William R. and Geraldine B. Myers Chair of Ministry,
Northern Seminary

Recalling the Hope of Glory

BIBLICAL WORSHIP FROM
THE GARDEN TO THE NEW CREATION

ALLEN P. ROSS

 **Kregel**
Academic & Professional

Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation

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*For Jan,
whose insight and inspiration
made an immense contribution to
this book.*

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Preface

THIS BOOK IS AS MUCH THE product of my personal pilgrimage as it is years of study. I suppose growing up in a pastor's home had me thinking at an early age about what went on in public and private worship. But my experiences in that church, a German Baptist Church, were only the beginnings of a pilgrimage that has taken me through many denominations and many different churches within the major denominations. And in the process I have been exposed to the major forms of worship. Then, when I began to speak in different churches, I was able to see firsthand the great variety of activities that go under the heading of worship. My experiences with churches and my teaching in the areas of the Psalms, Leviticus, Jewish backgrounds to the New Testament, and studies in worship itself, inspired even greater research into the subject. This book has emerged from this lengthy process.

I have written this book to inspire and encourage Christians, and therefore congregations, to study Scripture more closely on this subject in order to discover all that worship can and should be. There are many good works on the various aspects of worship, but none that focus almost entirely on the biblical passages that are concerned with the subject. To study Scripture with such a designated purpose enables Christians to see how much the Bible has to say on the subject, and how far we are from exhausting all the revelation of God on it. I am not trying to get people to change their denominational affiliation, although that might happen; but I am trying to change their thinking on the subject of worship so that they might begin to follow more of the principles and patterns of worship that are found in the Bible, which various groups have implemented effectively. If people will study the Bible with this in mind, it will be a life-long study, but it will be rich and fruitful—their worship activities will flourish in accordance with their discovery of what has happened in the

history of the faith. Their worship will become much more glorious, and their spiritual service will be raised to a much higher level.

The focus of the book is primarily on communal worship, though most of the principles can be easily used in private worship as well. But since worship is a communal activity, all the private acts of devotion will find their greatest expression and their divinely intended purpose in the assembly of believers. And when communal worship is glorious, it will in turn inspire greater private worship.

There have been far too many people to enumerate who have inspired or helped in significant ways in the writing of this book—pastors, teachers, students, and congregations. But I would like to mention my students especially, for in taking the courses and interacting with the material as it was being developed, they proved to be a valuable testing ground. Especially, I would mention Ross and Lauren Blackburn, who have been such an encouragement to me for even getting started. I am grateful also to Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, for its generous provision to enable me to finish the work. But most of all I thank my wife, Jan, who has been enthusiastic and encouraging about this project from its beginning and has contributed a good deal to the development of the ideas and the way they have been presented.

Abbreviations

Standard Resources

<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i>
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i>

Rabbinic Literature

<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i>
<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Demai</i>
<i>Eduy.</i>	<i>‘Eduyyot</i>
<i>‘Eruv.</i>	<i>‘Eruvin</i>
<i>Kid.</i>	<i>Kiddushin</i>
<i>Makk.</i>	<i>Makkot</i>
<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>Mid.</i>	<i>Middot</i>
<i>Neg.</i>	<i>Nega‘im</i>
<i>Nid.</i>	<i>Niddah</i>
<i>Pes.</i>	<i>Pesaḥim</i>
<i>Shab.</i>	<i>Shabbat</i>
<i>Sheḳ.</i>	<i>Sheḳalim</i>
<i>Sot.</i>	<i>Sotah</i>
<i>Suk.</i>	<i>Sukkah</i>
<i>Tos.</i>	<i>Tosephta (Tosefta)</i>
<i>Yad.</i>	<i>Yadayim</i>

Hebrew Transliteration Key

Consonants

א	ʾ
ב	b v
ג	g
ד	d
ה	h
ו	w
ז	z
ח	kh
ט	ṭ
י	y
כ	k
ל	l
מ	m
נ	n
ס	s
ע	ʿ
פ	p
צ	ph
ק	q
ר	r
ש	ś
ת	sh
ת	t

Vowels

—	a
ַ	ā
ֶ	āh
ֶ׃	ă
ֵ׃	e
ֵ׃׃	ē
ֶ׃׃	ê
ֶ׃׃׃	ě
ִ׃	e
ִ׃׃	i
ִ׃׃׃	î
ֹ׃	o
ֹ׃׃	ō
ֹ׃׃׃	ô
ֹ׃׃׃׃	ö
ֻ׃׃	u
ֻ׃׃׃	û

accents ˊ

Greek Transliteration Key

α	a
β	b
γ	g
δ	d
ε	e
ζ	z
η	ē
θ	th
ι	i
κ	k
λ	l
μ	m
ν	n
ξ	x
ο	o
π	p
ρ	r
σ	s
τ	t
υ	u; <i>often y</i>
φ	ph
χ	kh
ψ	ps
ω	ō
´	(rough breathing mark) h
˘ ˙ ˚	(accents)

P A R T 1

WORSHIPPING *the* GOD
of GLORY

Introduction

THE WORDS OF WORSHIP FLOW so easily from our lips that we seldom stop to think about them: we casually talk about knowing the Lord; we say we talk to God and in one way or another hear from God. We attend churches on Sundays to have, as we say, fellowship with God and each other. There we celebrate the belief that he is our God with songs and hymns, but even these have become so familiar to us that our minds drift to other, more immediate concerns. And when we approach the Lord's Table, to eat with God as it were, we often do not have enough time to appreciate what it means. In short, our worship services have become time-bound and routine. We have been so successful in fitting God into our important schedules that worship is often just another activity. But it should be anything but routine and ordinary.

After all, this God we say we know is the sovereign Creator and Lord of the whole universe, the eternal and ever-living God, all wise, all powerful, and ever present. Our attention to the Lord must not be an ordinary part of life; our worship of him should be the most momentous, urgent, and glorious activity in our lives. But we rarely see the splendor, the beauty, and the glory of worship because we are not drawn out of our world enough to comprehend this God of glory; consequently, our worship is all too frequently unexceptional and at times irrelevant.

If we could grasp the incongruity of speaking so casually about God, we would be overwhelmed and could never again worship comfortably in the same ways. We would think it too demeaning for God and too flattering for us. On the one hand, here we are, finite human beings, concerned chiefly with staying healthy and making a comfortable living. We spend our days in familiar routines with an array of anxieties and uncertainties threatening our sense of security. We genuinely would like to focus on worship and service, but more immediate concerns occupy our time.

And on the other hand, there is God, the sovereign and ever-living Lord. He is the inconceivable and incomprehensible source of all existence; he is the invisible majesty who reigns on high. This God we claim to know is the one before whom thousands upon thousands of angels and archangels stand, never ceasing to laud and praise him as the holy and glorious majesty. This Lord merely speaks, as he did at creation, and myriads of angels wait to carry out his will. He is completely unique, truly glorious and incomparably holy—there is no one like him, anywhere, at any time. And there is no measure of the magnificence and beauty of his holiness, for all his works are amazing, good, and glorious. And we say we know him!

Moreover, by his greatness and because of his grace, this God created us humans out of the dust of the ground and made us as his image; he made a Paradise for us and promised us immortality and everlasting joy in his presence. And even though we, his creation, treated him as worthless and relegated him to an insignificant place in our all-important lives, he still desired that we be with him and he with us. Therefore, he set about with his plan to bring us to glory. Such was his preoccupation with us, such was his love for us—who are but dust and ashes—that he prepared this plan in ages past, revealed it century by century, and then at just the right time in human history came into this little world in human form to die a humiliating death in our place so that our indifference to and rebellion against him could be forgiven and that we might still live with him forever. This incarnate Lord, the Jesus we talk about as if he were just another man, albeit extraordinary and exemplary, is the one who made all things. And he is the one who is the radiance of the glory of the Godhead, and the exact representation of the divine essence. It is he who bears the world along on its course by his powerful command. It is he who someday will come in great glory and power to judge the living and the dead. And it is he who will make all things new, a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness and peace will reign undisturbed. There is no power in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that can change his plan, for all wisdom, knowledge, power, and dominion belong to him. Nothing occurs, or has occurred, or will occur, that he does not know perfectly well. And because of who he is and what he has done, there is nothing in all this universe that can compare with his unimaginable perfection, illimitable majesty, and incomprehensible glory. Our minds can scarcely begin to take it in.

And we say we know him! How can we claim to know him, whose ways have been from everlasting past finding out, whose essence is beyond anything mankind could construct, the one who is infinite?

Well, we do know him, in part. We know him because he chooses that we should know him and reveals himself to us. We know him if we are willing to receive his revelation. And as we come to know him more and more we discover how well he knows us. He knows us, little us; he knows all about us, our trivial activities, our chief concerns, everything we think or say or do, even every hair on our heads. He knows us personally, individually by name. He knows us because he wants to know us, and that is the wonder of it all. He knows us because he wants us to be with him throughout eternity, to have immediate access to him as in the beginning, to sing with angelic choirs in glory, and to reign with him forever. He knows us because he is our God.

How then can we talk casually of this Lord? How can we merely slot him into our fully scheduled lives? How can we think there might be more important things for us to do in life than to worship him? If we even begin to comprehend his glorious nature, we cannot. We will be caught away from our worldly experience and transported in our spirits to realms of glory. We will be overwhelmed by the thought of being in his presence, tremble at the thought of hearing what he has to say to us, and be amazed at the thought that we can speak to him and he will listen! How can we not desire to transcend the ordinary routine by entering his courts to praise and glorify him above the profane things we so eagerly value? Truly, if our worship, if our spiritual life, is going to rise above this earthly existence where our minds are fixed on mundane thoughts and our attention is given to mundane concerns, then we are going to have to begin to focus our hearts and our minds on the holiness and the glory and the beauty of the one we say we know and love.

Our churches do not always make this easy. All too often the heartfelt desires of the worshippers to see God in his glory are frustrated by meetings and programs that often get in the way and jar our spiritual sensitivities. This, in spite of the fact that churches are always trying to make worship more meaningful. But usually these efforts focus on new methods and different styles designed to make worship more lively and more relevant rather than on how to inspire worshippers to see the true and holy God of glory. In an effort to simplify things and make them relevant,

the meaning and the mystery has been lost. As a result, in many services there may be almost nothing that is truly uplifting, moving, or even interesting. Efforts to improve worship often start with outbursts of energy and enthusiasm, but they have little lasting effect, and in time people are looking for other ways to do it, or for other churches that do it differently. This cycle indicates that worship needs constant attention—with a better focus. While many congregations are concerned enough to make the effort, there are too many that are satisfied that they have worship in good order and therefore think they need no reexamination. Sadly, some groups are not even touched by such concerns.

But there is evidence of an increasing interest in improving worship, judging from the amount of literature that has been written recently.¹ Will churches succeed in transforming worship for greater involvement of the people? Will churches improve praise and music with more relevant and meaningful material? Will they develop greater variety and spontaneity in their set forms and order of worship? No doubt what has been written recently on these kinds of details of worship will help bring about change; the more general works that try to capture the essence of worship and show how it has been expressed from the early church to the present are also helpful. But whether they will be able to break down the centuries-old barriers to more glorious worship remains to be seen.

For any significant change to occur in our worship activities, we have to get behind forms and methods and changes in style and focus on the biblical theology that informs worship, because one of the reasons, if not the main reason, for the lack of proper attention given to worship is the lack of a biblical, theological understanding.² That understanding must begin with a thorough study of the biblical text from the beginning of creation to the end of the age that traces the unfolding revelation of God's

1. A decade ago A. E. Hill listed some of the trends in worship renewal: an emphasis on personal piety and corporate worship, congregational participation through spiritual gifts, a return to the traditions of worship, a move toward holistic worship involving all the senses, the attempt to accommodate liturgy to the culture, a connection between worship and service, and a trend toward ecumenism. These beginnings need to be developed further, but with proper biblical and theological motivation (*Enter His Courts with Praise*, xxii).

2. Saliers says that one cannot divide theological thinking and liturgical participation. He is concerned with "continuing worship" as a form of theology, but approaches the subject liturgically (*Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*, 15).

design for communion with his people and the cumulative record of their appropriate responses to Him. Such a study will show how the patterns of worship have developed along with the outworking of God's plan of redemption, culminating with worship in glory in the presence of the glorified Christ.

Although the material for this study is vast and complex, the organization and presentation of it must be clear enough for churches to understand the abiding biblical patterns and principles of worship and to be able to examine what they are doing in the name of worship. When the matter is approached from the perspective of biblical revelation, the greatest changes in worship will take place in the hearts of the worshippers, which in turn will lead to the community's finding better ways of worshipping.

For worship to be as glorious as it should be, for it to lift people out of their mundane cares and fill them with adoration and praise, for it to be the life-changing and life-defining experience it was designed to be, it must be inspired by a vision so great and so glorious that what we call worship will be transformed from a routine gathering into a *transcendent meeting with the living God*. When that happens, then we will be caught up in our spirits to join the heavenly choirs of saints and angels who even now are gathered around the throne of God. Thereafter, our hearts and minds will be filled with the hope of glory so that we may truly love and serve the LORD in this life.

Without sustaining a vision of the holy Lord of glory, what some call the sublime "worship" very quickly digresses from the revealed design of worship that God desires and becomes routine, predictable, and even irrelevant. The starting point of any discussion of worship must be the object of worship, the Lord God himself, who is higher and more significant and far more glorious than life itself. This is the vision we need to inspire our worship; it is the vision that a world lost in sin needs in order to be reconciled to God.

In his discussion of this idea, John Stott writes that human beings are aware of a spiritual reality that is "awesomely vast" and transcendent but that they look for it in unlikely places:

They seek it everywhere, through yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and other forms of Eastern mysticism; through sex, which

Malcolm Muggeridge calls the “mysticism of the materialist”; through music and the arts; through drug-taking and the “higher consciousness”; through modern religious cults and dangerous experiments with the occult; and through the fantasies of science fiction.³

He draws this conclusion:

This quest for transcendence constitutes a challenge to the quality of Christian public worship. Does it offer what people are seeking—the element of mystery, the sense of the numinous, in biblical language the “fear of God,” in modern language “transcendence,” so that we “bow down before the Infinitely Great” in the mixture of awe, wonder, and joy called worship?⁴

The answer to this question is “not very often.”

3. John R. W. Stott, “The World’s Challenge to the Church,” 124. Bloesch also discusses the importance of a proper perception of God in *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:24–50.

4. Stott, “The World’s Challenge to the Church,” 125.

The Revelation of *the* Holy LORD God of Glory

The Revelation

The greater our appreciation and apprehension of the majestic God whom we say we worship, the greater will be our reverence, adoration, and service. This is the effect that we find in the biblical records whenever people received fuller revelations of the God of glory. One primary example of this is in the account of the calling of Isaiah, which tells how the prophet saw a vision of the glorious, holy LORD that transformed him into a devout and dedicated servant. Isaiah saw the LORD

seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD¹ Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:1b–4)

1. The standard representation of the divine name Yahweh with the substitute title “LORD” will be followed in this book, apart from the places where the exact name “Yahweh” is required to understand the passage fully.

This overwhelming sight could not have been timelier. The beloved King Uzziah had died; but Isaiah now saw “the King” (v. 5). Earthly kings come and go, but the LORD sits enthroned forever. This heavenly king is not earthbound: he is not subject to the fears and failures of this life as are pagan gods and mortals; he is neither human nor the product of human invention. He is the Sovereign LORD God, the eternal King of Glory.

God’s heavenly court was filled with angelic choirs that praise him endlessly for his holiness and his glory. Here Isaiah saw the seraphs, majestic angelic beings with wings and hands and voices, who are occupied with praising God.² These are either a form of cherubs or a separate order of angels; they have the appearance of fire and the function of praising God and supporting and guarding the heavenly throne.³

The glorious vision given to Isaiah enabled him to put into perspective the immediate troubles in his land and thus inspired the proper submission and adoration of worship. Consequently, this vision prepared him for the special task that God had in store for him. And likewise today, if people respond to the revelation of the Lord as did Isaiah ages ago, they too will be transformed into devout worshippers and dedicated servants. We may not see exactly what he saw; but we have far more revelation than he had. And the revelation that we have focuses on the same glorious LORD Isaiah saw.

The Holiness of the LORD

The angelic praise Isaiah heard has become a standard acclamation among the faithful: “Holy, holy, holy⁴ is the LORD of hosts.”⁵ And it will

2. The plural noun *seraphim*, perhaps related to *sāraph*, “to burn,” is often transposed into English as “*seraph*,” an angelic being. See Robin Wakely’s study in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:1289–91.

3. According to Ezekiel 1:10–28 and 10:2, 20, there were four creatures or *cherubim* at the throne of God. They were composite creatures with four wings, two of which extended up and supported the throne and two of which extended down to cover them. Their appearance was of burning coals of fire, and between them fire flashed back and forth. They were ever watchful (full of eyes) and always moving (with their wheels).

4. In the church this is often called the *trisagion*, “thrice holy” (*hágios* in Greek is “holy”). This will be discussed in the study of the early church, but for helpful information see Flusser, “Jewish Roots of the Liturgical Trisagion,” 37–43; and Werner, “The Doxology in Synagogue and Church,” 275–351 (esp. 292–307).

5. “Hosts” refers to angelic hosts, but may include earthly armies; they are all at God’s disposal.

be their song when they join the angelic choirs in glory (see Rev. 4:8). The brief acclamation expresses the essence of God, who is praised and adored forever—he is incomparably holy!

What do we mean when we say God is “holy”? By itself the word translated “holy” (*qādôsh*) simply means “set apart, unique, distinct.” Theologians have tried to improve on the translation, but we have nothing better than “holy.”⁶

The word for “holy” has a wide array of uses in the Bible, but essentially it describes anything that might be set apart for a specific reason.⁷ For example, a bowl set apart for use in temple ritual would be called “holy” and could not be used for ordinary or common meals (see Dan. 5:23). The understanding of the word is helped by a study of its antonym, “profane” (*khôl*, from *khâlal*), which refers to anything that is common, ordinary, or secular—not set apart.⁸ What is common may be good and useful in various aspects of life—but it is not “holy,” or set apart for God’s use.

To say that God is holy is to ascribe a uniqueness to him that is almost incomprehensible. It indicates that he is set apart from all that is creaturely and corrupt, that he is distinct from this physical and fallen world.⁹ It affirms that God is not like humans, angels, false gods, animals—or anything in existence. In short, we may say that *there is no one like God*, even though that statement has the obvious limitations of a negative sentence—it does not by itself say what he is. But when we

6. One suggestion is the translation “other.” It does make people stop and think in a different way, but it too needs clarification. See further Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*.

7. Many words are etymologically related to *qādôsh*, “holy.” There is the noun *qôdêsh*, “apartness, sacredness,” the nouns *qêdêsh* and *miqdâsh*, “sanctuary” and “sacred place” respectively, and place names like Kadesh, a sanctuary city. All these words in their contexts point to the meaning of separation from common use for a specific purpose.

Of course the primary use of the word *holy* has reference to God. For example, *places* set apart for the worship of God were called holy. Similarly, *times* were declared holy when they were to be devoted to God. And *people* were set apart to God and his service; they were to be “sanctified” to God: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2; cf. 1 Peter 1:16).

8. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, *profane* is derived from a variant of the Latin *profanus*, *pro* meaning “before (outside)” and *fanum* meaning “temple”—outside the temple, i.e., secular. It has come to be used to describe vulgar and base things.

9. See further Trevethan, *The Beauty of God’s Holiness*.

describe the holiness of God, we must think of his uniqueness. Isaiah records God's own description of his holiness: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever [inhabits eternity], whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit'" (Isa. 57:15). This is what makes communion with God so marvelous—he is high and exalted, separate and unapproachable, but he delights to dwell with us. It is the greatness of God that makes his grace so amazing; or to express it in terms of his grace, the way to God in the highest heaven is through the lowest contrition, for those of a contrite heart may know that God dwells with them, and they will dwell with him some day in the highest holy place. In Isaiah's vision this God is called "holy," incomparably holy, as the threefold repetition stresses.¹⁰

In what ways is God distinct (i.e., holy)? To answer this we have to think of the numerous attributes of God revealed in the Bible, for they represent God's holiness, or uniqueness, in specific areas.¹¹ For example, God is all-powerful (*omnipotent*; see, e.g., Gen. 18:14; Pss. 33:9; 115:3; Matt. 19:26). His power is revealed in his mighty acts, such as creation, salvation, and judgment. No one else has power like that, no one on earth or in heaven. Angels are created beings and not divine; humans are weak and frail; and the pagan gods, even with spirit forces behind them, are impotent and worthless. But God is different; he is not weak or dependent. So with respect to power, God is holy.

The Bible also reveals that God is all-knowing (*omniscient*; see Pss. 139:1–6; 147:4–5; Matt. 10:29–30; Rom. 11:33). He knows everything—he knows all that has happened, all that will happen, and all that could happen. No one else has that kind of knowledge. So, with reference to knowledge, God is holy.

God is also everywhere at once (*omnipresent*; see 1 Kings 8:27–29; Ps. 139:7–12; Jer. 23:23–24; Acts 17:27–28). Who in heaven or on earth can do this? Who can even understand it? So with regard to space, God is holy.

He is also eternal; he is without beginning and without end (Ps. 90:1–2; Isa. 43:10–13; John 1:1–2; Rev. 1:8, 17–18). He alone lives forever—in fact,

10. With the threefold repetition of the word *holy*, some have suggested there is a hint of the fullness of the Godhead, especially in view of the later verse in Isaiah 6 in which "we" and "us" form part of the word from God. But to say Isaiah understood that would be difficult to prove.

11. See Packer, *Knowing God*; and Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*.

he is alive in a sense that we cannot begin to understand, for he is the giver of life, the sustainer of life, and the restorer of life—he is life! In the aspect of time and eternity, he is holy.

God is righteous (Gen. 18:25; Pss. 7:9–12; 145:17). All his acts are right and just. He commits no iniquity and will leave no iniquity unpunished or any good unrewarded. People may have the capacity to do righteous things but not continuously or characteristically. And because their righteousness does not measure up to God’s standard, they must admit that they are unrighteous next to him. The pagan gods were certainly not righteous; they had all the vices and imperfections of the people who served them. But God is perfect and right in all his ways; in this too he is holy.

Even when we consider the attributes that God shared with humans at creation, we find that there is still a vast difference. For example, God, who is merciful and compassionate, gave people the capacity to show mercy and compassion. But our mercy and compassion is limited by our human nature, and consequently we can only reflect these divine attributes in an imperfect way. If we continued down the list of all the attributes—his faithful love, goodness, wisdom, and the like—we would find the same thing. There is no one like him—he is holy.

So while the word *holy* retains the basic idea of being set apart, it takes on a greater, more positive meaning when it is fully understood in reference to God. Holiness is not one of many descriptions of God; it is the summary designation of all that God is and is known to be in contrast to all of creation.¹² Therefore, the Bible speaks of the holy LORD as the one, true and living God Almighty—not *a* god, not Israel’s national god in competition with other national gods, and not one holy being among many, but *the* Holy LORD God, as we see in Isaiah 44:6–8:

This is what the LORD says—
 Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
 I am the first and I am the last;
 apart from me there is no God.
 Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.
 Let him declare and lay out before me
 what has happened since I established my ancient people,

12. See Labushchagne, *The Incomparability of YHWH in the Old Testament*.

and what is yet to come—
 yes, let him foretell what will come.
 Do not tremble, do not be afraid.
 Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?
 You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?
 No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.

The connotation of *holy* ultimately goes beyond negative descriptions to affirmations of positive power and perfection.¹³ Accordingly, when anyone or anything is set apart to God, that person or object comes under the dominion of a power that is life changing, dangerous (if violated) or beneficent (if received).¹⁴

The revelation of the exalted holy LORD was given to Isaiah to change the way people respond to God for all time. That is why the prophet recorded his vision of the sublime¹⁵ and the words of the angels around the throne, crying “holy, holy, holy.” The impact of such a revelation is overwhelming; it causes people to tremble and fall down before him. The prophet and countless others after him have been inspired to devout service by the revelation of the power and perfection of the LORD.

The Glory of God

In Isaiah’s vision the angels also proclaimed, “The whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3b). In the Scriptures the “glory of the LORD” is the most dramatic manifestation of the presence of the LORD. To talk about God’s holiness is to speak of his essential nature; but to speak about God’s glory is to declare his importance or the display of that importance in history and in creation.

The noun translated “glory” (*kāvôd*) is related to a verb “to be heavy” (*kāvêd*), which by extension means “important.”¹⁶ It can be used for the human soul, that is, the real person, the essential life (Ps. 30:12).¹⁷ In

13. Eichrodt describes it as a “marvelous power, removed from common life and bound up with particular objects.” The connection of the word with the idea of morality came with the preaching of the prophets (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:271).

14. E. Jacob, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 86.

15. The word *sublime* means “exalted, lifted up, preeminent.”

16. The word can describe anything that is literally heavy, such as a man (1 Sam. 4:18) or a rock (Isa. 32:2); but it can also be used figuratively to describe blindness (eyes

this sense *kāvôd* is what gives a person “importance.” Everyone has this *kāvôd*, this inner glory or importance, but the LORD has a quality of it superior to everyone else.¹⁸

The word *glory* came to refer to all the trappings that reflect the importance or greatness of someone. Joseph, for example, told his brothers to inform their father of his glory (*kāvôd*; NIV: honor) in Egypt (Gen. 45:13). When this meaning is applied to the LORD, as in “the glory of the LORD,” it refers to all the manifestations of his powerful presence, such as the stars of the heavens (Ps. 19:1), or the brilliant, luminous cloud at the sea and in the wilderness (e.g., Exod. 14:19–20, 24). Moses saw that, but still wanted to see God’s “glory” (Exod. 33:18). He wanted to see past the bright cloud and the fire to the real person: “Show me your glory.” The Greek version chose to translate this verse using a pronoun rather than *doxa*, the Greek word for “glory”—“Now show me *yourself*.” This translation captures the precise connotation of the word in Moses’ request.

When the Bible uses the word “glory” or “glorious” with reference to the LORD, it is basically saying that *he is the most important or preeminent person* in this or any other universe. And when the Bible refers to the “glory of the LORD,” it is usually referring to all the evidence of God’s preeminence. It may speak of him as the Creator by focusing on the heavenly hosts of stars and galaxies as the glory of the LORD; or it may reflect his powerful presence by displaying the brilliant luminous manifestations usually accompanied by angels; or it may refer to his mighty saving works

that are “heavy”; Gen. 48:10), or unbelief (a heavy or hardened heart; Exod. 9:7), or wealth (“heavy” with silver and gold; Gen. 13:2). The related meaning, “important,” arises because what has weight was perceived as important (like our idiom of “throwing one’s weight around”). So things or places or people that are important, such as the temple (Hag. 2:3), or priestly robes (Exod. 28:2), or even a forest (Isa. 10:18), are described with words related to *kāvôd*. Paul captures this meaning in 2 Corinthians 4:17 with a word play based on the Hebrew background of the Greek words “the eternal *weight* of *glory*.” A derived form has the meaning “to treat as important, to honor” (*kabbēd*). To honor the Sabbath day (Isa. 58:13) meant that people were to treat it as more important than the other days. Parents were to be honored, that is, given their proper (weight of) authority (Exod. 20:12). If people honor God, they will demonstrate his importance in their lives by obedience (Mal. 1:6) and praise (Ps. 50:15).

17. The word for “liver” in these languages is a related noun, for the liver is the heaviest organ and therefore thought to be the most important, or at least at the center of the human life.

18. Jacob, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 88.

as evidence of his glory, his true nature. All such manifestations are properly called “the glory of the LORD.”¹⁹

To speak of God’s “holiness” is to say that there is no one like him, that he has absolute power and perfection; to speak of God’s “glory” is to say that he is preeminent in existence and that the whole universe is filled with evidence of his importance and sublimity. And while it would take some time to draw from Scripture all the details that describe the nature of the LORD, these two expressions, holiness and glory, have come to be used by the worshipping communities down through the ages to describe God’s nature as praiseworthy, inspirational, and authoritative.

The New Testament records the final revelation of the sublime in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, the writer to the Hebrews says, is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (1:3).²⁰ John explains that although no one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son has revealed him (John 1:18). And John claimed that he and others were privileged to behold his glory (John 1:14). On the Isle of Patmos, John received the revelation of the risen Christ in glory, a vision that brought together the many revelations of the LORD given down through biblical history. In fact, when John reported how Jesus fulfilled the suffering servant prophecy recorded in Isaiah 53 as well as the ministry described in Isaiah 6, he explained that “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (John 12:41). It was the second person of the Trinity in glory, the preincarnate Christ, who was revealed to Isaiah as the holy LORD, high and lifted up.²¹ And now that the Son of God has taken on mortal flesh (John 1:14) and fully revealed the Father (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; Heb. 1:1–4), all true and complete worship must focus on the full revelation of God in Christ.²²

But to the degree that a vision of the sublime has faded from the con-

19. See D. F. Coggin, *The Glory of God*.

20. Bloesch says that God’s glory as the shining of his light in a dark world finds its fullest manifestation in his Son (*Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 38).

21. Not only was the LORD high and lifted up in the vision, but at the cross Jesus was also lifted up to draw all people to himself. Even in his ignominious death he was exalted; thus, the essence of the sublime nature of Christ includes the glory of the cross.

22. Because Christ Jesus is the incarnate LORD God, the only true and living God, then it is impossible to conceive of worship without Christ. Worship that is not centered in Christ completely disregards the final and complete revelation of God in the new covenant.

sciousness of religious people, adoration and reverence as well as obedience and service have also been diminished. For worship to rise above the clutches of a materialistic and secular world, the church must once again focus on such revelations of the LORD of glory. The revelations of glory revealed in Scripture will inspire all we do in the name of worship. Without them we, and our worship, will wither and fade; but with them we will be able to keep our eyes fixed on what is eternal (2 Cor. 4:16–18). And as we do so, we shall be changed into that glory, and all our expressions of worship will be more glorious (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus, properly motivated worship will be transforming.

The Response to the Revelation

The Immediate Response

The apprehension²³ of the revelation of the holy LORD God of glory will bring about an immediate response (Isa. 6:5), which, although varied from experience to experience in some of its outward expressions, is essentially one. Those who received such a glorious revelation were completely overwhelmed. After all, the visions were so glorious, so otherworldly, that mortals could hardly take them in. But what they had no trouble understanding in the light of those visions was their own frailty and sinfulness. When John on Patmos saw the vision of the risen Lord in glory, he fell to the ground as if he were dead (Rev. 1:17). Earlier revelations were not as complete as that which John saw, but they still were overwhelming. When Jacob awakened at Bethel from his vision of the LORD and the angels ascending and descending on the stairway, he was afraid. His immediate response was, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:16–17). Then he responded with appropriate acts of worship. Job also was overwhelmed by a direct revelation from God and, although it was not a vision of the full heavenly court, he responded with reverential fear and self-disdain, or in the words of Isaiah, humility and contrition (Isa. 57:15). When God spoke out of the whirlwind, Job could only say, “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more” (40:4–

23. The word *apprehension* captures both ideas of comprehending and accepting by faith what has been understood.

5). Then after additional revelation he declared, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (42:5–6).

Not only is there an acknowledgment of who God is, but there is also a confession. The prophet Isaiah was gripped with fear because he now realized his sinful condition. “Woe to me!” he cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isa. 6:5).

Such revelations were not made to terrify or destroy people but to inspire them to greater devotion and service. And as we shall see, throughout the history of the faith there have developed a great number of appropriate responses to divine revelation, whether that revelation was as exceptional as one of these visions or simply the clear revelation of the written Word of God. Thus, in general terms, “worship” refers to the appropriate response to the revelation of the holy God of glory. More specifically, Christian worship, whether individual or collective, is the *structured and ordered expression of the proper response* of the people of God to the revelation of God in Christ. And in relationship to the whole life of faith, worship is actually the point of concentration at which the whole of the Christian life comes to ritual focus, for what we do in worship has a bearing on everything else we do in the faith, and how we live out our faith will impact our worship.²⁴ The Bible itself does not give a comprehensive definition of worship; it simply describes things that people have done or should do when they receive the revealing words and works of God.

In the Old Testament “worship” is the translation of a word that means “bow oneself down low to the ground” (*hishtakhāwāh*).²⁵ The word can be used in secular contexts, such as in the accounts of Joseph’s brothers bowing down to him (Gen. 37:10; 43:28). But its meaning in contexts where people bow before the LORD often includes more than the mere act of bowing to the ground. For example, in Genesis 22:5 it includes Abraham’s plans to sacrifice; Abraham told his men: “We will worship and then we will come back to you.” Also, Job’s troubles prompted him to worship: he tore his robe, shaved his head, and falling to the ground he

24. Wainwright, *Doxology*, 8. Some say that the whole Christian life is our worship. In one sense that is true, but the biblical language of worshipful acts is more specific.

25. The word has been traditionally connected to a root *shākhāh* (see BDB), but may actually be related to *khāwāh*. See Emerton, “The Etymology of *Hiṣṭah^awāh*,” 41–55.

worshipped God (Job 1:20). The word also seems to have a wider reference in Exodus 24:1, where the LORD summoned of Moses and the priests and the elders to ascend the mountain “and worship from afar”; they were to participate in a number of acts of worship on Mount Sinai when the covenant was inaugurated. It also has a more general meaning in Exodus 33:10, which says that the people “stood and worshiped” the LORD from the doors of their tents. At Solomon’s dedication of the temple, all the people “saw the fire coming down to the altar and the glory of the LORD above the temple,” and they knelt “with their faces to the ground and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD” (2 Chron. 7:3). Psalm 66:4 parallels the verb “worship” with singing praises.²⁶

Likewise in the New Testament one key word for “worship” (*proskuneáō*) also means “to bow down” (*kuneáō*, “to kiss”). The word can be used for the simple act of kneeling before someone who is respected or revered (Matt. 8:2; 9:18). But it can also indicate the sense of full worship, as with the obeisance of the wise men before the holy child (Matt. 2:2, 8, 11), or when the disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus after he walked on the water (Matt. 14:33), or when the women clasped the feet of the resurrected Jesus and worshipped him (Matt. 28:9). This is the term used when Jesus declared that those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The word is used frequently in the book of Revelation, such as when the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the exalted Christ (4:10; 5:14; 19:4) and when the company of angels worship (7:11).²⁷

The New Testament also uses *sébmōi* for worship; it has the sense of giving reverential homage. The verb is used in Matthew 15:9 (and Mark 7:7), “They worship me in vain,” indicating the honor the people gave with their lips (but not with their hearts).²⁸ When it describes the God-fearer or worshipper in the book of Acts, *sebómenos* refers to worship and

26. The verb also can be used for the worship of false gods, for the same posture and accompanying mental and physical acts would be involved. It is used in the prohibition of idolatry (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9) and reiterated with the confirming of the covenant in the land: “Do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them” (Josh. 23:7). The verb *bow down* signifies all that such an act would represent in worship.

27. It is also used in Revelation to describe unbelievers who worship demons (9:20), or those who had not worshipped the beast (20:4).

28. It too is used for false worship, as of the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana in Latin, Acts 19:27).

not just reverence. That it has something to do with exaltation may be seen in the related noun *sebastós*, “reverend, august” (*augustus* in Latin), which indicates an exalted place, usually a sacred place.

Thus both Testaments use words for bowing down and giving homage to mean worship in general. To bow down before someone, a king or God, is to show adoration, devotion, submission, and service; and by the physical act of bowing the object of the veneration appears higher and so is exalted. And so when the Bible describes people bowing down before the LORD, it usually means more of what that particular posture represents. This was one posture that would be clearly understood.

The Essence of Worship

The worshipful response to the revelation of the holy LORD God of glory will have certain characteristics that may be exhibited in different ways and with different levels of intensity. But they form the essence of worship.

Fear and Adoration

People respond differently to the mystery and majesty of God. On the one hand when there is no appreciation of the mystery and majesty, people are indifferent, curious perhaps, and at times irritated.²⁹ But the positive reaction of wonder and reverence, which is the response of faith, turns into acts of worship, for the revelation moves from evoking a sense of fear and astonishment to one of self-abasement and adoration. Isaiah’s response was: “Woe to me! . . . I am ruined.”

It is not surprising, then, that the expression “the fear of the LORD” is used to describe the proper response of the worshipper. There are some who are uncomfortable with the use of “fear” for worship, or “God-fearer” for the devoted worshipper. But even the New Testament refers to the fear of God as an essential part of piety and service (Matt. 10:28; Eph. 5:21; Heb. 12:28; 1 Peter 2:17; Rev. 14:7). Whenever we come into the presence of God in worship and truly perceive who it is that we are worshipping, the natural response will be reverential fear. The absence of reverence in worship indi-

29. Meland’s observations on how the scientific approach to life has dulled our sense of wonder, though dated, are still relevant today (Meland, *Modern Man’s Worship*). The discoveries of science should increase our wonder over the power and the majesty of God.

cates that we do not think that God's presence is there in a special way.

The Old Testament word for fear (*yārēʿ*) can mean “be afraid, stand in awe, reverence.” Accordingly, that which is feared is referred to with forms of this word that mean “awesome, dreadful, terrifying.” There is no problem understanding this meaning of fear or dread;³⁰ the difficulty is relating it to the positive meaning of “reverence.” The English *revere* includes the ideas of regarding something as sacred or exalted, of holding something in deep and usually affectionate or religious respect, or of venerating. The religious sense does not eliminate the basic idea of fear but turns it into positive devotion. Like the Israelites at the base of the fiery mountain, we should shrink back from the Holy One because his power is terrifying—and yet we are drawn to him in adoration and wonder because his power is glorious. In worship we draw near to him because he has called us to draw near to him, and we want to be near him, but we do it with reservation and caution. On the human level the same tension between the two aspects of the word occurs, for people may be afraid of certain things and shrink back from them, but they are attracted to them as well—dangerous animals, tornadoes, or natural wonders. The presence of God is likewise both attracting and frightening.

For the sinful person who has every reason to fear God, the aspect of fear will be uppermost in the contemplation of God. But for the righteous person, who by God's invitation draws near to commune with God, the aspect of reverence will be uppermost, reverence tempered by the knowledge that he is the Sovereign Lord of all creation. When John saw Christ in glory, he fell at his feet as though dead; but then the Lord placed his right hand on him and comforted him in his presence (Rev. 1:17–18). The revelation of the nature of our Lord in glory ought to fill us with fear and wonder too, but that initial fear will turn to adoration and praise because he has made it possible for us to be with him.

Confession and Commitment

If the revelation of God inspires fear and adoration, it also leads to spiritual renewal in the worshipper. Here is where the purpose of the revelation of the glory of God is realized, for the worshipper begins to

30. The basic meaning of the word is to express fear, or terror, as in life-threatening experiences (Jonah 1:5). This meaning also can be found in “religious” contexts, such as when people are afraid of the LORD's judgment.

participate fully in that glory. Fear and adoration alone do not constitute worship. Before the infinite God we must lose ourselves, for we are finite; but in his presence we find ourselves as we are renewed in our spirits daily (2 Cor. 4:16). Because the Holy One has made himself known to us in order to redeem us, and redeemed us in order that we might worship and serve him, we first must be conformed to his glory. At the outset there must be a personal acknowledgment, verbal or mental, of who this God is and of who we, the worshippers, are. This acknowledgment we call confession: we confess our faith in the Lord, and we confess our need of the Lord.

Isaiah's response was: "Woe to me!" When he saw the vision, he was filled not only with wonder but also with fear because in seeing the LORD in glory he was made fully aware of his sinfulness—he was unclean, with unclean lips, and dwelling in an unclean generation. His focus on his "unclean" lips was in contrast to the glorious words of praise that he heard coming from the lips of the angels; he realized that what passed from his lips was mundane and trivial. Conversely, it may also be said that those who never envision the holiness of the LORD never truly see themselves for what they are.³¹

Isaiah's confession of his unclean condition led to the removal of his impurity and his commission to service. Here, then, we see the spiritual progression that is to be reflected in true worship: *revelation*: the vision of the holy LORD of glory overwhelmed the prophet and uncovered his sinfulness; *cleansing*: his confession brought direct intervention from the LORD to remove the sin (6:7); and then *commitment*: once the prophet was cleansed from sin, he was able to hear³² the word from God calling him to greater service. Isaiah's commitment was the proper and necessary answer to the point of the revelation: The LORD asked, "Whom shall I send?" and the prophet responded, "Here am I. Send me." Revelation demands a response; and commitment demonstrates that the worshipper has properly understood the revelation and desires to participate in it.

31. Tozer says, "A person who has sensed what Isaiah sensed will never be able to joke about 'the Man upstairs' or the 'Someone up there who likes me'" (*Whatever Happened to Worship?* 74).

32. The Hebrew syntax is very clear on the sequence here: "then I heard."