

“Worship has been described as the source and summit of the entire Christian life. Orthodoxy in its foundational etymology is ‘right or true doxology or glory.’ Or more simply, it is ‘right worship.’ The intimate marriage of biblical theology with worship theology and practice is therefore a most crucial and relevant endeavor. *Biblical Worship: Theology for God’s Glory* is truly an invaluable compendium to that end, outlining the scriptural foundations for the expression of right theology in the worship of God’s people throughout the entire biblical narrative. The theological, devotional, and moral/ethical formation in which God’s people are, and have always been, called to participate in worship is indeed for the very life of the world and the advancement of God’s kingdom.”

—James R. Hart, President,
Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies

“Christ followers have been called to submit their whole lives as a living sacrifice. *Biblical Worship: Theology for God’s Glory* provides a wealth of information that facilitates just that—theology unto the glory of God. The authors accomplish their purpose of developing biblical doxology, submissive homage, and worshipful response to the revelation of the Almighty. By looking both backward to the worship of the Old Testament and forward to the worship of the New Testament, readers are able to see the consistency and seamlessness of God’s design for worship and make practical applications to present-day doxology, aiding the spiritual act of worship which is holy and pleasing to God.”

—Hanna Byrd, Director of Practica,
Liberty University School of Music

“In a world that is driven by pragmatics and the appearance of success, I welcome any and all efforts to recover a biblical theology of worship and to demonstrate its importance for the church today. This volume makes an extremely important contribution to that project. The editors have given us access to a magnificent collection of essays by more than thirty scholars, all writing from their areas of expertise, and covering most of the genres of Scripture. The result is a kaleidoscope of images of biblical worship ranging from essays that focus on the function of liturgy and cult to daily life as worship, but all drawing on the Scriptures for their portrayal of worship that pleases and glorifies God.”

—Daniel Block, Guenther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament,
Wheaton College Graduate School

“*Biblical Worship: Theology for God’s Glory* is a comprehensive guide that’s deeply rooted in Scripture and grounded in solid exegesis, while also eminently approachable for worship leaders—which I mean in its broadest sense. The thirty-four men and women whose scholarship comprise this work have explored the topic with a depth and breadth that few resources can claim. It’s an excellent book.”

—Sandra Glahn, Professor of Media Arts and Worship,
Dallas Theological Seminary

“In the revelation within the Bible, there is an inexhaustible beauty to God. As nothing limits God’s power or love, there seems to be no limits to the proper wonder and awe of the Lord God, too. *Biblical Worship: Theology for God’s Glory* helps us see this amazing breadth of how biblical people have worshiped the God revealed in the Scriptures. Come, read how biblical authors have been ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise’ and be drawn into the same with them.”

—Lester Ruth, Research Professor of Christian Worship,
Duke Divinity School

“As believers we are called upon to worship the Lord, and this volume helps us grasp what the biblical writers mean by worship. We are treated to a guided tour of the canon by the contributors to the volume, and thereby we are enriched by the diverse expressions of worship in the Scriptures. The significance of the biblical teaching is applied to the contemporary world, and I am grateful for this fine work which reminds us afresh that we are called upon to worship in spirit and truth.”

—Thomas R. Schreiner,
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament
Interpretation, Professor of Biblical Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Worship is at the heart of the Bible, but the changing patterns of worship through the biblical story can be a challenge for readers. This book leaves no part of the biblical canon out of account and consistently develops the implications for our personal and corporate prayer and worship today.”

—Richard Bauckham, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies,
University of St. Andrews

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

BIBLICAL WORSHIP

Theology for God's Glory

BENJAMIN K. FORREST,
WALTER C. KAISER JR.,
AND VERNON M. WHALEY

E D I T O R S



Biblical Worship: Theology for God's Glory

© 2021 by Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Vernon M. Whaley

Published by Kregel Academic, an imprint of Kregel Publications, 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked BSB are from The Holy Bible, Berean Study Bible, BSB. Copyright ©2016, 2018 by Bible Hub. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked HCSB are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked NET are taken from New English Translation (NET). NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2017 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NETS are taken from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, © 2007 by the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Inc. Used by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked TNIV are from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by Biblica®. Used by permission of Biblica®. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations not marked are the author's own translation.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4556-9

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 / 5 4 3 2 1

*To Reagan Adeline Forrest,
may you raise your voice and spend your
life in worship of our wonderful Savior!*

—BKF

*To my wife Nancy Elizabeth,
who loves to sing with me the songs of
praise and worship to our Lord every day!*

—WCK

*To Dr. Paul Rumrill,
lover of “the Most High God,” powerful prayer
partner, student of worship, true friend, and comrade.*

—VMW

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
ABBREVIATIONS.....	11
CONTRIBUTORS	15
INTRODUCTION: Worship as Theology for God's Glory – Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Vernon M. Whaley....	18

WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 1: Worship: A Concept Study in Biblical Hebrew – Peter Y. Lee	23
CHAPTER 2: Royal Priests Created to Worship: Worship in the Garden ... and Beyond – William R. Osborne.....	37
CHAPTER 3: Drawing Near to a Holy God: Priestly Worship in the Tabernacle – Christine Elizabeth Palmer.....	51
CHAPTER 4: The Calendar for Worship in Ancient Israel: Worship in the Feasts and Celebrations – JoAnna M. Hoyt	68
CHAPTER 5: Trust and Obedience as Worship to Yahweh: Worship in the Book of Joshua – J. Michael Thigpen.....	82
CHAPTER 6: Deteriorating Devotion among God's People: Worship in the Book of Judges – Jillian L. Ross.....	97
CHAPTER 7: Sacred Places, Acts, Times, and People in the Worship of Yahweh: Worship in Israel's United Monarchy – Eugene Merrill	120
CHAPTER 8: Kingship and Faithfulness: Worship and the Divided Kingdom – N. Blake Hearson	137
CHAPTER 9: The Context of Worship in the Psalter – Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Willem A. VanGemeren, and Erika Moore.....	155
CHAPTER 10: Covenant Hope in the King Regardless of Circumstances: Worship in Book 1 (1–41) of the Psalter – Erika Moore....	163
CHAPTER 11: The Call and Cause to Praise: Worship in Book 2 (42–72) of the Psalter – Ted Hildebrandt	176
CHAPTER 12: Worship as Covenantal Dialogue: Worship in Book 3 (73–89) of the Psalter – Dickson Ngama	190
CHAPTER 13: Praising the King Who Reigns: Worship in Book 4 (90–106) of the Psalter – Walter C. Kaiser Jr.....	206
CHAPTER 14: Responding to the Questions Brought by the Hiddenness of God: Worship in Book 5 (107–50) of the Psalter – Willem A. VanGemeren and Jinsung Seok.....	214
CHAPTER 15: Trusting in the Sovereignty of Yahweh: Worship in the Hebrew Megilloth – Mark Rooker	229

CHAPTER 16: Hearing, Responding, and Submitting to the Voice of God: Worship in Isaiah – <i>John Oswalt</i>	244
CHAPTER 17: True Knowledge of God and the Transformation of the Heart: Worship in Jeremiah and Ezekiel – <i>Gary Yates</i>	256
CHAPTER 18: True Worship versus False Worship: Worship in the Preexilic Minor Prophets – <i>R. Alan Fuhr</i>	271
CHAPTER 19: Reestablishing Righteous Worship: Worship in Ezra – <i>Donna Petter</i>	281
CHAPTER 20: Protecting the Sanctity of Zion: Worship in Nehemiah – <i>Thomas Petter</i>	299
CHAPTER 21: Restoring Proper Relationship with Yahweh: Worship in the Postexilic Minor Prophets – <i>Andrew Hill</i>	310

WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 22: Worship: A Concept Study in New Testament Greek – <i>Craig L. Blomberg and Ben R. Crenshaw</i>	332
CHAPTER 23: A Proper Worship of Yahweh: Worshiping Jesus in the Synoptics – <i>Monte Shanks</i>	350
CHAPTER 24: Jesus as the Temple and the Fulfillment of the Feasts: Worship in John – <i>Donald Roe Love III</i>	364
CHAPTER 25: Life Together in the Last Days: Worship in the Acts of the Apostles – <i>Brian J. Tabb</i>	377
CHAPTER 26: Unity in Christ: Worship in the Corinthian Church – <i>Benjamin L. Gladd</i>	397
CHAPTER 27: Worship Rooted in Doctrine for Life: Worship in Galatians and Romans – <i>Kenneth Berding</i>	410
CHAPTER 28: Doing All Things in the Name of the Lord: Worship in the Prison Epistles – <i>A. Chadwick Thornhill</i>	428
CHAPTER 29: The Word, Prayer, and Practice: Worship in the Pastoral Epistles – <i>Ray Van Neste</i>	441
CHAPTER 30: The Superiority and Worship of Christ: Worship in Hebrews – <i>Dickson Ngama</i>	455
CHAPTER 31: Grounded in Allegiance to Christ and Affection for God: Worship in John’s Letters – <i>Andreas Köstenberger</i>	469
CHAPTER 32: God’s Spiritual House: Worship in 1 Peter – <i>Karen Jobes</i>	481
CHAPTER 33: Worship as Resistance and Embrace: Worship in 2 Peter and Jude – <i>Greg Couser</i>	490
CHAPTER 34: Hallelujah, What a Savior! Worship in the Apocalypse – <i>Edward E. Hindson</i>	503
EPILOGUE: Biblical Worship for the Glory of God – <i>Benjamin K. Forrest and Vernon M. Whaley</i>	515
SCRIPTURE INDEX	517

CONTRIBUTORS

Kenneth Berding (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is professor of New Testament at Talbot School of Theology.

Craig L. Blomberg (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is distinguished professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary.

Greg Couser (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is senior professor of Bible and Greek at Cedarville University.

Ben R. Crenshaw is a doctoral student at Hillsdale College.

Benjamin K. Forrest (EdD, Liberty University) is associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of Christian education at Liberty University.

R. Alan Fuhr (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is associate professor of Old Testament at Liberty University.

Benjamin L. Gladd (PhD, Wheaton College) is associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson.

N. Blake Hearson (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is associate professor of Old Testament at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ted Hildebrandt (PhD, Grace Theological Seminary) is professor of biblical studies at Gordon College.

Andrew Hill (PhD, University of Michigan) is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College.

Edward E. Hindson (ThD, Trinity Graduate School; DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary; DPhil, University of South Africa) is the founding dean of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity and Distinguished Research Professor at Liberty University.

JoAnna M. Hoyt (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) is an adjunct professor at Dallas International University, a visiting professor at Dallas

Theological Seminary, and assistant editor for the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary Series.

Karen Jobs (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is professor of New Testament Greek and exegesis, emerita, at Wheaton College.

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. (PhD, Brandeis University) is the Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and president emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Andreas Köstenberger (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Dr. rer. soc. oec., Vienna University of Economics) is research professor of New Testament and biblical theology and director of the Center for Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Peter Y. Lee (PhD, Catholic University of America) is professor of Old Testament and dean of students at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Donald Roe Love III (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is associate professor of New Testament at Liberty University.

Eugene Merrill (PhD, Columbia University; PhD, Bob Jones University) is distinguished professor emeritus of Old Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Erika Moore (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is academic dean, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, and director of the STM program at Trinity School for Ministry.

Dickson Ngama (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary; PhD ABD, Liberty University) is instructor of Old Testament and theology at Liberty University.

William R. Osborne (PhD, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is associate professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at the College of the Ozarks.

John Oswalt (PhD, Brandeis University) is visiting distinguished professor of Old Testament at Asbury Seminary. He is author of *Isaiah* in the NIVAC.

Christine Elizabeth Palmer (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is instructor of Old Testament exegesis and biblical theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Donna Petter (PhD, University of Toronto) is director of the Hebrew Language Program and associate professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Thomas Petter (PhD, University of Toronto) is Senior Pastor, Trinitarian Congregational Church, Wayland, MA, and associate professor of Old Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Mark Rooker (PhD, Brandeis University) is senior professor of Old Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Jillian L. Ross (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of biblical studies and director of biblical languages programs at Liberty University.

Jinsung Seok (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is an adjunct professor at Sungkyul University and a pastor in South Korea.

Monte Shanks (PhD, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is assistant professor of New Testament at Liberty University.

Brian J. Tabb (PhD, London School of Theology) is the academic dean and associate professor of Biblical Studies at Bethlehem College & Seminary.

J. Michael Thigpen (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is executive vice president, provost, and professor of Old Testament at Phoenix Seminary.

A. Chadwick Thornhill (PhD, Liberty University) is graduate program director of biblical and theological studies as well as associate professor of biblical studies.

Willem A. VanGemeren (PhD, University of Wisconsin) is professor emeritus of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Ray Van Neste (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is dean and professor of biblical studies, School of Theology and Missions at Union University.

Vernon M. Whaley (PhD, University of Oklahoma) is associate vice president of program development and professor of worship at the School of Music and Worship Arts at Trevecca Nazarene University.

Gary Yates (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) is professor of Old Testament at Liberty University.

INTRODUCTION: WORSHIP AS THEOLOGY FOR GOD'S GLORY

*Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser Jr.,
and Vernon M. Whaley*

The story of biblical worship is one where the common is made sacred by proximity to that which is uncommon. From the beginning God sought to call out a people for a unique relationship from among creation. Time and again, however, humankind tarnished the sacred, but God in his providence has offered redemption. Redemption ultimately comes through Christ, but the story leading to Christ takes us through a journey spread over thousands of years where sacred places were constructed (Exod. 26), moved (Num. 1:51), built (1 Kings 6), and torn down (2 Kings 25), all leading to a the wonderful revelation in John 4, where Christ tells of a day when place will not matter for worship (John 4:19–22) because the people of God will become his dwelling place (1 Cor. 3:16; Acts 1:8), as we worship in Spirit and truth (John 4:23–24). This story leading to Christ through worship also travels through paths showing the need for sacred people who perform sacred rituals. Here mediators intercede on behalf of a sinful people to propitiate the sin of individuals and of a nation (Exod. 30:1–10; Lev. 6, 16). These rituals are filled with meaning (Lev. 1), symbolism (Lev. 16:20–22), and significance (Exod. 12:21–28; cf. Num. 19:1–10; Heb. 9:11–28), and the people divinely chosen to carry these out have been set apart for this work (Num. 8:5–26). But both the people and the ritual fail to bring about lasting worship—for these are imperfect pictures of what is only perfected in Christ, who is the “only mediator between God and man” (2 Tim. 2:15) and the only sacrifice that wholly cleanses from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Last, we also see that throughout this story, time too is sacred. Seasons are set apart for feasts and fasts, where strict observance of worship is not only expected but also required. Yet as the story continues from the wilderness to the kingdoms to exile and return, we see a people falling short of the expectations clearly laid out in the law (Ezra 9–10). As Christ came, however, he ushered in a new

dispensation that will ultimately find its fulfillment in a heavenly feast where bride and groom join together forever (Rev. 19:6–9). This is the story of biblical worship. It begins with a commission, in the beginning, to worship (Gen. 1–3; cf. Exod. 20; Deut. 5), and it ends in the culmination of a heavenly host singing the eternal praise of the one who is worthy (Rev. 19:1–8).

If this is the story of biblical worship, it is proper to situate ourselves within this story, learning from both righteous and wayward worship that we might faithfully join in the song of the redeemed (Ps. 107:1–3; Rev. 5:9; 14:1–5). Worship then is not dictated by those who bring it, but by the one who commissions it and is worthy of its reception (Exod. 25–31; 2 Sam. 6:1–7; 1 Chron. 29; 1 Kings 6:11–13; 8:1–66). Therefore, what God has said about worship must be our pursuit for our worshiping. And so to understand our call to worship, we must turn to Scripture humbly and honestly asking that we might understand our calling to worship well. This pursuit is not one we can master in our own endeavoring, but an obedient response to that which has been laid out in the pages of Scripture for the people of God. Right worship is thus eternal, for the object of our worship has no end, and this worship in which we now join will be our vocation throughout eternity.

THEOLOGY *UNTO* THE GLORY OF GOD

Humanity was made to worship and this truth is ingrained on our hearts for, as Augustine noted, “our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹ Worship of God, rightly expressed, satisfies our deepest hungers and thirsts because this is what we were made for. God has revealed himself to humanity in his written Word and the Word that became flesh. J. I. Packer has said, “Theology is for doxology.” Understanding the Word and the Word ultimately is for worship. For Packer, doxology is “glorifying God by praise and thanks, by obedient holiness, and by laboring to extend God’s kingdom, church, and cultural influence.”² And it is this idea that stands behind the conviction of this project. We believe that theology is worship, and that worship must be theological. Therefore, biblical worship is theology *unto* the glory of God. Nothing less is acceptable. But what is worship, and how do we understand the way that places, people, ritual, and time play into our rightful worshiping? Two helpful definitions can begin to answer this first question, and we hope that the following chapters begin to answer the second. Daniel Block defines worship as “reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to his gracious revelation of himself and in accord with his will,”³ while Allen

1. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1

2. J. I. Packer, “Reading the Bible Theologically,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible’s Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, eds. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 34.

3. Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 23.

Ross says that worship is an “appropriate response to the revelation of the holy God of glory.”⁴ If worship is theology as we have proposed, submission as Block has stated, and a response to summarize Ross’s definition, then our exploration in the coming chapters must cultivate these three dispositions at the very least, and that surely is our goal. We hope that readers will grow in their theology as doxology, their submissive homage, and their responsiveness to God’s revelation of himself.

EDITORIAL CONVICTIONS

Our pursuit of accomplishing such lofty goals is imperfect at best, but nonetheless, it is our best attempt at faithfully accomplishing such a holy aim. What will soon follow is a series of chapters working out from Scripture what various portions of the biblical text have to say about worship. Each chapter has organizational similarities while allowing for the voices of each author to tell their story from their study and their expertise. Authors were tasked to tell this story using the organizational tools of context, theology, and significance, and so each chapter is built around these three headings so as to situate the theology of worship in the context of the text so that application could faithfully follow. There is much more to say on each of these chapters—these surely will not be the final word on worship in their corresponding portions of Scripture—but we hope that readers will find them encouraging to their souls and useful in their teaching, preaching, and practice. This book is aimed at Christians who want to worship well, according to Scripture. It does not discuss stylistic or denominational approaches to worship. Instead it is a biblical-theological approach to the text to ask how the context of a passage bears on the theology and what this theology then leads to with regard to significance. It is our belief that this approach compels our worship in the right direction, and then allows for cultures and denominations to decide on its practice from an informed position.

If the story of biblical worship intends to include us in its composition, then we must turn to the text and ask how we might posture ourselves to worship well according to all that God has laid out. It is our hope that readers will situate themselves within this story and learn from it, so that we might join early with the heavenly hosts singing praises to the Lamb who sits on the throne (Rev. 5).

4. Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006), 50.

WORSHIP
in the
OLD TESTAMENT

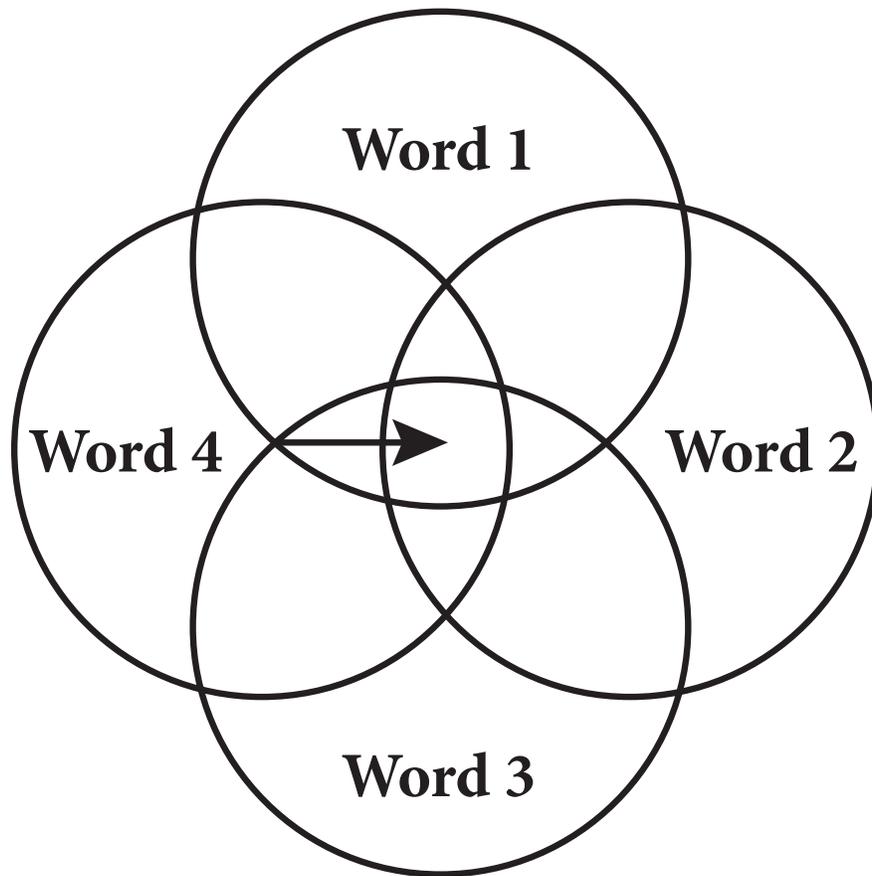
CHAPTER 1
WORSHIP: A CONCEPT STUDY IN
BIBLICAL HEBREW

Peter Y. Lee

Worship is at the very heart of the Old Testament. There seems very little doubt about this assertion. To be in the presence of the Lord in his house of worship represented one of the highest expressions of the blessed life, if not *the* highest. The psalmist in Psalm 84:10 describes such contentment that comes from worship when he says, “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”¹ A similar sense of bliss is mentioned in Psalm 27:4: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” These two poetic declarations are samples of countless others in the pages of Scripture that state the genuine joy found in the true, godly worship of God (see Ps. 36:7–9; 47:1–12; Isa. 2:2–3; 44:28; Jer. 3:17–18; Mic. 4:1–3).

In many ways, the entire direction and flow of the history of Israel pivots on this aspect of worship. When Israel was properly worshiping the Lord, all was well. It is when they engaged in improper worship that their life began to collapse. The zeal that the Lord had for his own glory would not permit such impropriety in the worship life of his chosen people (see Exod. 20:3; Isa. 43:25; 48:9–11; 49:3; Ezek. 36:22–23; Ps. 106:7–8; Rom. 9:17). He revealed to them set standards on how worship is to be done, and he would not settle for anything less. Above all else, Israel’s worship was required to be in accordance to his revealed Word.

1. In the MT, this is verse 11.



But what was that biblical standard of worship? The intent of this volume is to answer that very question. This opening chapter will introduce key concepts that make up a biblical understanding of worship by examining key words and translational methodologies in Biblical Hebrew. Although there is some semantic overlap, certain words in Biblical Hebrew provide a particular contribution to comprehending the Israelites' worship life. It is the combination of these words that clarifies the concept of worship in the Old Testament (see diagram). The investigation of these words will reveal what it meant for the people of the Old Testament to participate in proper worship of the Lord. Although such an approach cannot address every detail in the worship life of ancient Israel, it will nonetheless give a framework on which Israel engaged in their devotions to their Sovereign. From this study, we will see the following five principles clarified as we explore the semantic domains that make up a study of worship: (1) sacred journey, (2) sacred structures, (3) sacred practices, (4) sacred disposition, (5) and a sacred goal.

WORSHIP AS CONCEPT IN TRANSLATIONAL PRACTICE

Before our study begins, we begin with two brief comments on methodology. The first is regarding the choice of Hebrew words examined below. There are words in Biblical Hebrew that can be properly translated “worship.”

However, there are a number of other words that cannot be translated as such yet are included in this study. The reason for this is because the concept of “worship” is broader than words that can be translated as “worship.” If we were to narrow our research to only those few words that mean “worship,” we would have an extremely limited and unhelpful picture of Israel’s worship life. This is because the domain of words related to worship is larger than the singular usage of words expressly translated from Hebrew to English as “worship.” This would mean such an approach would fail to include analysis or evaluation of the “fear of God” because these three words are not technically translated as “worship” when moving from Hebrew to English, even though the context and meaning of this phrase has great implications for worship, both in the time of the Israelites and today. Failing to study these related words, therefore, will hinder our final goal—which is to gain an accurate concept of worship in the Old Testament.

Second, the words under examination should not be taken as representing concepts. Rather, each word is part of an overall schematic (mosaic) that contributes to a general holistic understanding of worship. Each “word” provides an aspect of understanding worship. It is only when they are systematized that we are offered a “concept” of worship. This distinction has been the battle of lexicographers ever since the publication of James Barr’s seminal work *The Semantics of Biblical Language*.² In it he criticized biblical theologians for “overload[ing] the word with meaning in order to relate it to the ‘inner world of thought.’”³ By “inner world of thought,” Barr meant the mistaken way in which scholars did conceptual studies in the name of lexicography. His point is that this is not lexicography. The statement “God is love” captures a conceptual idea that cannot be inserted in every occurrence of the word “love” or “God.” Such an approach obscures the meaning of a word in any given context. All of the words studied below have a wide range of meanings, one of which is related to worship. Thus it is the *meaning* associated with worship that is the focus of our interest. More than a vocabulary lesson, my goal is to gain a clearer understanding of the theme of worship by examining the use of these key words in the literary context of worship. Therefore, we will begin this study to see what lies beneath it to aid in understanding worship in biblical Hebrew.

Sacred Journey

Worship in biblical Israel required that Yahweh’s followers journey to him. There is a connotation that requires their seeking him in the place where he would reveal himself.

The word *darash* has the general meaning “to seek.” The nuance of the word is often effected by the context and the object of what is sought. In

2. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

3. Barr, *Semantics*, 246.

cases where the object being sought is God or objects and/or places associated with God, there is a sense in which the purpose of the seeking is for the sake of worship. Andrew Hill points out two examples where *darash* is even translated as “worship” in the RSV (Ezra 4:2; 6:21).⁴ What this word tells us is that there are certain locations that the Lord himself designates as the only proper places for worship.

Perhaps the best example of this sacred use of *darash* is in Deuteronomy 12:5. The first four verses describe the Deuteronomic mandate placed on Israel to destroy the foreign pagan worship sites once they have settled in the land of Canaan. In addition to this, verse 5 states that the Lord will choose the place where he is to be worshiped. Israel is to “seek” this place. Regardless of which portion of the land they are allotted as their inheritance (Num. 32; Josh. 13–19), worship will be centralized at one place and the Israelites are to journey to this place for worship. The use of the verb *bo* (to enter), which immediately follows *darash*, confirms this expectation to travel to a particular location. This is also reinforced in verse 11, which is nearly identical to verse 5. Where the verb *darash* and *bo* are both used in verse 5, only the verb *bo* is used in verse 11. This suggests that the two different words communicate the same concept of a sacred place.

The word *darash* occurs prominently in 1 and 2 Chronicles with God as the direct object (1 Chron. 10:14; 13:3; 15:13; 16:11; 21:30; 2 Chron. 1:5; 7:14; 12:14). It frequently occurs in combination with the related verb *biqqesh*, which also means “to seek” (1 Chron. 16:10, 11; 2 Chron. 11:16; 15:15). Second Chronicles 7:14 is particularly helpful as it affirms that when the people of God suffered the consequences of their covenant violation (i.e., exile), there was still hope of restoration if they only “seek” the Lord with sincerity and humility. In fact, the Chronicler measures the success of the past Judean kings based on whether they “sought” the Lord (2 Chron. 14:4; 15:12) or not (2 Chron. 25:15, 20). The message to the postexilic community who received this book was clear: as difficulties arise in their task to rebuild the ancient cult center in Jerusalem, the Lord would bless those who “seek” him but reject those who do not.

Without a doubt, the notion of “seeking” this central place of worship is behind the rationale for the pilgrim festivals mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:1–17, where the three annual Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths are described. Verse 16 states explicitly the necessity of travel and even alludes to Deuteronomy 12: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose.” Notice the reference to the “place that he will choose” is similar to Deuteronomy 12:5: “the place that the Lord your God will choose.” Although the verb *darash* does not occur in chapter 17, the verb *bo* does, thus reinforcing the necessity to seek the Lord by “going” to this centralized site of worship.

4. Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (1993; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2.

In contrast to this centralization of worship was the practice of the patriarchs. It was not uncommon for them to build altars at various locations where God performed a significant, redemptive act (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9, 13; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 7). Since the patriarchs were sojourners (not residents) in the land of Canaan, they were not required to localize their place of worship. Once their children claimed that land as their covenantal inheritance, however, worship was no longer to be done at numerous locations. Instead, there would be one central place with one central altar that they must “seek.”

This singular place of worship contrasted with the worship of Canaanite deities, which required numerous worship sites. Since Israel was strongly committed to monotheism (Deut. 6:4), this was paralleled with the one site of worship. This was the reason that Joshua panicked when the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan. It was only after they explained that this was a memorial, not a cultic center, that the remaining tribal groups held off any formal acts of judgment against them (Josh. 22:10–34).

This was also the reason that Jeroboam’s act in 1 Kings 12:25–33 was abominable. In this passage, Jeroboam established not just one illegitimate worship site but two, one in Dan and the other in Bethel. He knew that in order to establish a new northern Israelite nation, his people could not continue to go to Jerusalem to offer worship at the central shrine, where their allegiance to him would be challenged. He needed to establish his own religious practice; thus he constructed the two false places of worship. It was due to this practice that the Lord condemned him and eventually rejected his kingship (1 Kings 13).

Thus in the word *darash* we read about the call to the ancient Israelites to “seek” their God by journeying to their central cult site, which would eventually be the temple of Solomon in the city of Jerusalem. Worship, therefore, could only be done in one proper place. Anywhere else would be a disgrace.

Sacred Structures

Worship was done at specially designated locations, in specific structures of worship. Prior to the establishment of the temple and thus the required pilgrimage described above, the lone structure of worship was the tabernacle. There were various Hebrew terms used for the tabernacle, each of which highlighted particular aspects of the structure. The most prominent section dedicated to the tabernacle is Exodus 25–31 and 35–40, which gives a detailed description of its architectural design and construction. The first term used in reference to the tabernacle was *miqdash* (see Exod. 25:8; cf. Lev. 16:33). There had been an increasing anticipation for this structure ever since the redemptive event in Exodus 14–15, where the Lord divided the waters of the Red Sea to provide a way of salvation for his people (Exod. 14). This colossal event was celebrated in song in Exodus 15, which praises the Lord as the Divine Warrior who freed his

people so that they may worship him at the mountain of his inheritance in his “sanctuary” (*miqdash*, v.17). There was thus an expectation for this coming “sanctuary.” It is fulfilled in Exodus 25:8 as the Lord builds this structure through the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

The root of this word is derived from *quiddesh*, which means “to be holy.” Thus it seems that the holy character of God is accentuated by this term. Although the word *miqdash* occurs only in Exodus 25:8 within the tabernacle sections of chapters 25–31 and 35–40, the fact that this is the first word used in reference to the tabernacle gives the reader the primary understanding of its intrinsic character. Above all else, it is a *holy* structure. Its holy characteristic is further emphasized by the fact that the word *qodesh*, meaning “holiness,” is frequently used instead of *miqdash* throughout the remainder of the construction sections (Exod. 30:13, 24; 36:1, 3, 4, 6; 38:24, 25, 26, 27). To add further emphasis, the heart of the tabernacle is called the “most Holy Place,” literally “the holiness of the holinesses” (*qodesh haqqodashim*, Exod. 26:33, 34). If there were any doubts about its holy character, they were erased by the use of this word *qodesh* as a substitute for *miqdash*. The fact that both words are translated as “sanctuary” shows the interconnection between the two and the overarching holiness of this place.

The reason for the emphasis on this holy attribute of the “sanctuary” is due to the fact that the “holy” God (see Lev. 19:2; Isa. 6:3) is the one who dwells within it. This is confirmed in Exodus 40:35, which states the “glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” at its completion. This awe-inspiring, holy presence of God is also what made Mount Sinai holy (Exod. 3:5) as well as the land of Canaan (Josh. 5:15) and the Israelites themselves (Exod. 12:16; 19:6). This is also the rationale as to why the Israelites were to live as holy people (Lev. 19:2).

The blessed reality is that this all-holy God does not remain distant and far off. Instead, he abides within the midst of his covenant people. This is what we read in Exodus 25:8. Immediately after Israel is instructed to build this *miqdash* “sanctuary,” they are told for whom and why they are building it: “that I may dwell in their midst.” The verb “I may dwell” is from the verb *shakan*, which means “to abide, settle down, dwell.” It can be used in reference to the dwelling of people (see Num. 24:2; Deut. 33:20). When the subject is the Lord, it is much more significant since this holy God is no longer far off but is “in their midst.” This notion of the Lord “dwelling” in the midst of the Israelite community is further underscored by the fact that the word *mishkan*, which is based on the root *shakan*, is constantly used (more common than *qodesh*) in reference to the tabernacle. It appears immediately in verse 9, then an additional fifty-seven times in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40.

The fact that *miqdash* is the first word to appear in reference to the tabernacle provides the proper understanding of the transcendent nature of God and this holy sanctuary. This is further emphasized by the repeated use of the word *qodesh*. The Lord, however, does not want to be

distant from his covenant people, whom he had just liberated from centuries of enslavement under Egyptian taskmasters. He is nearby and “dwells [*shakan*] in their midst” (Exod. 25:8). The imminence of this holy God is then further highlighted by the overwhelming use of the word *mishkan*. Therefore, the interplay between these two words, *miqdash* and *mishkan*, in the book of Exodus reveals to the reader a blessed theological truth—the transcendent God is also imminent and in their midst.

In addition to the terms above, the tabernacle is also repeatedly referred as an *ohel moed*, “tent of meeting” (Exod. 33:7; cf. 27:21; 28:43). It occurs approximately 150 times in the Old Testament, with the highest concentration in the Pentateuch (i.e., Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers). The reference to a “tent” (*ohel*) tells us that this structure was portable. It could be disassembled, transported, and rebuilt as needed (Exod. 40:34–38). The three sons of Levi (Kohath, Gershon, Merari) were assigned to care for and manage the various components of the tabernacle during their wilderness wanderings (Num. 4–5). By its very name, this tent was for a *moed*, “meeting” or “assembly.” Given the proximity with his people, this would be the location where the Lord would meet with them through mediatorial intercessors (Lev. 8:3–4; Num. 2:17; 14:10; Josh. 18:1). The ritual function of this structure is evident from its close association with the Aaronic priesthood. They were the ones charged with its maintenance and care (Exod. 27:21; 30:16). This would also be the location where sacrifices would be offered to the Lord by the priests (Exod. 29:10–11, 42; Lev. 1:3, 5). It thus had a significant cultic purpose, which easily made this the most important sacred structure during the wilderness era of Israel’s history.

The “assembly” may also anticipate a similar type of gathering that occurs later in the history of salvation. This is brought out when the *ohel moed* is compared to the similar phrase *har moed*, “mount of assembly,” which occurs only in Isaiah 14:13. In that passage, the “mount of assembly” appears in apposition to the “heights of the north.” According to Psalm 48:3, the “heights of the north” is the location of “Mount Zion,” the “city of the great king,” which is the ultimate location of the tabernacle in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings 8:4 = 2 Chron. 5:5).⁵ In fact, there are certain places where only the word *moed*, “assembly,” is used as a reference to the temple and the worship of God in the temple (Ps. 74:4; Lam. 2:6). Therefore, this supports the cultic and worshipful purpose of the “assembly” in the tabernacle. The fact that the word “assembly” can also be used in reference to the temple shows that there is an organic and linguistic connection between these two sacred structures.⁶

5. See C. C. Torrey, “Armageddon,” *HTR* 31 (1938): 237–248. In this article, Torrey persuasively demonstrates that the illusive phrase “Armageddon” in Revelation 16:16 is derived from the Hebrew *har moed*.

6. For further details on the furnishings and theology of the tabernacle, see Richard E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and

When the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan, the tabernacle was no longer mobile. Instead, it was placed in particular locations for long (yet unspecified) durations of time. It began in Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; 19:51; 1 Sam. 2:22). For reasons not recorded within the historical books, the tabernacle ultimately made its way to Gibeon (2 Sam. 6:17; 1 Chron. 16:1), where it stayed until the temple of the Lord was constructed (1 Kings 8). During this time, Israelites were most likely required to “seek” out the Lord for worship at these specified locations (1 Sam. 3:3; 1 Kings 3:4). This was their practice until the construction of the temple in the city of Jerusalem. After that, the new centralized location of worship was permanently at this newly built cultic site.

Like the tabernacle, various different Hebrew terms are used in reference to the temple. One word in particular is *hekal*. This word was most likely a loanword from the Akkadian *ekallu*, which in turn was a loanword from the Sumerian *E.GAL* (meaning “great house”). The Akkadian and Sumerian words were used for the “palace” of monarchs and the “temple” of gods. Thus it is not surprising to find that the Hebrew *hekal* can have the same uses (for “palace,” see 1 Kings 21:1; 2 Kings 20:18 = Isa. 38:17; 2 Chron. 36:7; Dan. 1:4). When it is used to mean a “temple,” it is often in construct with the divine name YHWH, thus the *hekal of Yahweh* (see Isa. 6:1; 2 Kings 18:16; 2 Chron. 26:16; Jer. 7:4; Zech. 6:12–13). Given this semantic range, we must discern the use of the word *hekal* cautiously. It can refer to the temple as a place of sacrifice and worship (1 Kings 6:1, 17), but also as a divine “palace,” which reflects the Lord as the monarch over Israel (Ps. 11:3; 18:7 = 2 Sam. 22:7; Mic. 1:2; Hab. 2:20; Zech. 6:12–13) and over all of creation.

This notion that the God whom Israel worships is also their divine Sovereign comes from 2 Samuel 7, where the Lord made a covenant of perpetual kingship with David and his sons. According to this passage, David reached a place of power and prominence in a united Israel. He felt that it was inappropriate that the Lord would remain in a meager abode when he was in a grander home (v. 2). For that reason, he wanted to build for the Lord a *bayit*, “house.” The Lord responded by saying that David would not build for him a “house,” but rather the Lord himself will build David a “house,” meaning a “household” of royal monarchs. In turn, it would be one of these sons of David who would build a “house” for the Lord. We know from the history of Israel that Solomon was the Davidic son, who would build this “house” for the Lord (1 Kings 8). This wordplay with the Hebrew *bayit* became the basis for referring to the temple as “the house [*bayit*] of the Lord” (1 Kings 7:12, 40, 45, 51) or “the house [*bayit*] of God” (1 Chron. 9:11, 13, 26). Therefore, when Solomon completed the construction of this temple not only did this make the city of Jerusalem

David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 807–27. For further details on the archeological studies, see Richard E. Friedman, “Tabernacle,” in *ABD* 6:292–300.

the new central location of all Israelite worship but it also became the theological center of the entire cosmos.

The Lord was the true heavenly king of Israel who was seated in his “house [*bayit*] of exaltedness” (1 Kings 8:13). He was also the thrice-holy God who was the center of Israel’s worship (Isa. 6:3). Interestingly, the word *miqdash*, which was used in reference to the tabernacle, is also used in numerous occasions for the temple of the Lord (Ps. 74:7; 2 Chron. 20:8; 26:18; 29:21). Second Chronicles 36:17 even uses the phrase “house [*bayit*] of their sanctuary [*miqdash*].”

The most meaningful use of *miqdash* as a place of temple worship may be Psalm 73. The psalmist begins in a state of confusion as he wrestles with the prosperity of the wicked while he suffers in spite of his faithfulness to the Lord. He is unable to reconcile this logical incoherency, and as a result, he falls into a state of intellectual and emotional turmoil. It is only after he enters into the “sanctuary [*miqdash*] of God” that he is able to discern the truth of life. The wicked, who appeared to enjoy the materialism of the world, live in a state of instability, and are ultimately rejected by the Lord. The psalmist, on the other hand, comes to realize that the Lord was always with him and that “God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26). This is a valuable lesson, perhaps one that Israel also needed to be reminded of on a regular basis: the wicked do not escape the judgment of the king of the cosmos who sits enthroned on his “house.” At the same time, Israel is freed to give their hearts in worship to the Lord, who is more precious than silver, gold, or even all the wisdom of this world.

Sacred Practices

I have established the concept of the sacred journey, where the Israelites were called to “seek” the Lord on a regular basis for worship. I have also described the sacred structures, where worship was done. The practice of worship in these sacred locations is the subject of the next section of this study. Although we have very little description of an actual service of worship in the Old Testament, several words give us a small glimpse into the practice of worship in these sacred places.

The Hebrew verb *hishtahawa* is the word most commonly translated as “worship.” It was a long-held view that this verb was from the *hithpael* (reflexive) stem of the root *shahah*. Once the ancient texts from Ugarit were studied, the root *haway*, meaning “to prostrate oneself,” was discovered. It did not take long for Hebraists to realize that this was the root behind *hishtahawa*.⁷ This verb occurs more than 170 times in the Old Testament.

7. The general consensus now is that the verb is from an archaic infixed-t causative *saphel* stem of this root. As is often the case when the sibilant *sh* is adjacent to the prefixed *t*, the two consonants metathesize, thus *hishtahawa* as opposed to *hitshahawa*. It is not certain whether the ancient Hebrew writers were aware of the historical origins of this verb. The comments above

The basic meaning of this verb is “to prostrate oneself” or “to bow down.” This gesture of prostration is not necessarily an act of worship. It can be a form of greeting of a stranger (Abraham before the three men in Gen. 18:2; Lot in 19:1; Moses to Jethro in Exod. 18:7), a gesture among family members (Jacob bows before Esau in Gen. 33:3; Joseph before Jacob in Gen. 48:12; Solomon to his mother Bathsheba in 1 Kings 2:19), submission before a person of stature and honor (Ruth before Boaz in Ruth 2:10), an act of respect (David before Jonathan in 1 Sam. 20:41), even begging (1 Sam. 28:14). It is a common act that is done before figures of royalty (David prostrates himself before Saul in 1 Sam. 24:9 [Eng. 8]); see also 2 Sam. 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 22; 15:5; 16:4; 18:28; 1 Kings 1:23, 53; 2 Chron. 24:17). The expectation that inferiors bow down before high-ranking officials is seen in Esther 3:2, where all the king’s servants bowed to Haman with the exception of Mordecai, who did not bow nor “pay homage” (*hishtahawa*) to him. This enraged Haman and led to his bloodlust against Mordecai. The most frequent use of this verb in the Old Testament, however, is as an act of worship before the Lord (1 Sam. 1:3; Ps. 29:2; 95:6; 96:9; 99:5, 9; 132:7; Jer. 7:2; Ezek. 46:9). It was strictly forbidden for Israel to “worship” (*hishtahawa*) other gods or idols, although their history records their constant violation of this mandate (Exod. 20:5; 23:34; 34:14; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 5:9). There are many times when worship is done by the actual gesture of bowing down (Josh. 5:14), while in other cases it refers to a general sense of worship (Gen. 26:24). In these cases, *hishtahawa* usually occurs with a verb meaning “to bow down” (*qadad*: Gen. 24:48; Exod. 4:31; 12:27; 2 Chron. 20:18; cf. Num. 22:31, where both mean “bow down”; *sagad*: Isa. 44:17; 46:6; *kara*: 2 Chron. 7:3; 29:29).

The Old Testament does not limit this act of worship to Israel alone. The prophets frequently depict the foreign nations also coming to the Lord to “worship” him and recognize his sovereign rule over all nations (Ps. 22:28, 30 [Eng. 27, 29]; 89:9; 96:9; Isa. 45:14; 49:7; Zeph. 2:11; Zech. 14:16). Even the angelic realm bows down before the Lord in worship (Ps. 29:2; 97:7). The use of this verb extends beyond the confines of earthly peoples to include even the angelic counsel. The vision of worship in the Old Testament is thus universal in its scope.

In addition to *hishtahawa*, another prominent word used to refer to the act of worship is the verb *abad*. The basic meaning of this word is “to make, do, serve.” It is frequently used to mean working the ground (Gen. 2:15) or a general sense of service (Exod. 20:9; 21:6; Deut. 5:13; 15:12, 18). This is the verb used to describe the Israelite labors under the harsh conditions in Egypt (Exod. 1:13; 5:18). It is also commonly used in a cultic

follow a diachronic analysis. There is another possible approach, a synchronic one. Here, the verb could be reanalyzed as deriving from the *hithpael* stem from a rare quatra-literal root *sh-H-w-y*, meaning “to prostrate oneself.” Depending on the perspective (synchronic or diachronic), either analysis is linguistically sound.

context, which is where the meaning “worship” is brought out. That this word is closely associated with *hishtahawa* is evidenced by the numerous times the two occur together in parallelism.⁸

Several specific uses of this verb *abad* as “worship” are noteworthy. Exodus 3:12 states that the reason why the Lord commissioned Moses to free the Israelites and to bring them to Sinai was so that they could “worship” (*abad*) him on his holy mountain. In fact, Moses stresses this point constantly to Pharaoh (Exod. 4:23; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 24, 26). This act of *abad* is further described as an act of “sacrifice” (Exod. 3:18; 5:3), thus confirming its use as an act of worship. Consider, also, how this verb is used for observance of the Feast of Passover in Exodus 13:5: “you shall perform [*abad*] this service [*aboda*].” In addition to the verb *abad*, the noun form of the verb also occurs in this passage in reference to Passover: *aboda*, “this service.” It is even used in reference to the sacrifices associated with the central altar at the temple (Isa. 19:21). Just as Israel was called not to “worship” (*hishtahawa*) idols and false gods (see above), so they were also called not to “worship, serve” (*abad*) them either (Exod. 23:33; Deut. 4:28; Josh. 23:7).

The verb *abad* can also be used to refer to the maintenance, upkeep, and transporting of the tabernacle. In this regard, the verb has a close association with the Levitical priests. Numbers 3:6–8 is helpful in this understanding as it says that the Levites were brought to Aaron to keep his duties and the duties of the assembly of Israel before the “tent of meeting” by “serving [*abad*] the service [*aboda*] of the tabernacle” (cf. Num. 16:9). The following chapters in Numbers proceed to describe in detail the specific duties of each of the three sons of Levi and their responsibilities regarding the packing and transporting of the tabernacle during their wilderness wanderings. The Levites had a similar task with the temple (Ezek. 44:11; 45:5; 46:24). In this sense, *abad* has a strong affinity with the verb *sheret* (*piel* only). The verb *sheret* generally means to serve as an assistant to a superior (Joshua to Moses in Exod. 24:13; Josh. 1:1; Elisha to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:21; Levites to Aaron in Num. 3:6; 13:2). It is also used similarly to *abad* in the context of the worship life of Israel, specifically in connection to the tabernacle (Num. 1:50; 3:31; 8:26; Deut. 18:7) and the temple (1 Kings 8:11).

Whereas the uses of *sheret* appear to be limited to the cultic institution of Israel, so *abad* seems to have a broader aspect that views life as a whole as a worship to the Lord. Deuteronomy 10:12–13 is outstanding in this regard as Israel is instructed to “walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve [*abad*] the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good.” Joshua gives Israel the same charge in a covenant renewal ritual as they drew near to the conquest of the land of

8. Exod. 20:5; 23:34; Deut. 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:25 (Eng. 26); 30:17; Josh. 23:7, 16; Judg. 2:19; 1 Kings 9:6, 9; 2 Kings 17:35; 21:3, 21; Jer. 8:2; 13:10; 16:11; 22:9; 25:6; 2 Chron. 7:19, 22; 33:3.

Canaan to possess their long-awaited homeland (Josh. 22:5). Notice the extent to which Israel is called to “serve” the Lord—“with all your heart and with all your soul,” alluding to the great commandment of Deuteronomy 6:4. Concerning this comprehensive use of *abad*, David Peterson states, “Although cultic service to the living God is clearly involved, some contexts set this service within the broader framework of fearing him, walking in all his ways, and observing all his commands and decrees.”⁹

Sacred Disposition

The reference to loving and serving “with all your heart and with all your soul” highlights that biblical worship cannot be limited to superficial acts of ritual practice. Such religious formalism was detestable to the Lord (Isa. 1:11–14). Whether Israel were to “bow down” (*hishtahawa*) before the Lord or “serve” (*abad*) him in their cultic life or general living, genuine worship must be done from the heart and soul. Thus, along with these sacred practices, a sacred disposition was needed within the heart and soul of Israel.

Deuteronomy 10:12 stresses how sincere devotion to the Lord comes from the inner core of Israel by stating that they are to “fear [*yare*] the Lord your God” as well as walk, love, serve, and obey him. Although the fear of the Lord is more associated with Wisdom Literature (e.g., Prov. 1:7), it is still an important part in true worship as it establishes the proper awe-inspired deference needed when coming before their covenant Lord (see Exod. 3:6). Later in Deuteronomy 10:16, the heart-centeredness of worship is further underscored when Moses states that Israel must circumcise their hearts. This stresses that outward circumcision is nothing unless it is accompanied with a genuine heart of devotion. Much later, Deuteronomy proclaims that what they cannot do on their own merit (circumcise the heart), the Lord will do for them as a blessing of the new covenant (Deut. 30:6, 14; Jer. 32:39; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Rom. 10:8) and thus give them the ability to do what they could not do prior—worship the Lord with all their heart.

Sacred Goal

Thus far I have discussed the *sacred journey* toward the *sacred structures* where the people of God would engage in *sacred practices* of worship with a *sacred disposition*. The final noteworthy comment is the goal. What is all this to accomplish?

It is not difficult to observe the sinfulness of Israel in the Old Testament. They were reminded of this on a daily basis and their need for a restored covenantal relationship with their God. The way to accomplish this was by implementing the various types of sacrifices as outlined in Leviticus 1–7. Although it is tempting to engage in a full discussion on

9. David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 65–66.

the theology of the atonement in this extraordinary book, we must limit our thoughts specifically in answer to one question: What was the goal of the sacrifices?¹⁰ This is an important question to answer with regard to worship since sacrifices were central to the worship experience for Israel.

There were five specific types of sacrifices implemented in ancient Israel. The burnt offering, *ola* (Lev. 1:3–17), and grain offering, *minha* (Lev. 2:1–16), were offered in total to the Lord and represented atonement for sin and “complete consecration to God.”¹¹ The peace offering, *shelamim* (Lev. 3:1–17), where Israel partook of the sacrificial meal, represented the restored covenantal relationship between the Lord and his covenant people. The sin offering, *hattat* (Lev. 4:1–5:13), and guilt offering, *asham* (Lev. 5:14–6:7), dealt with the need to expiate the sins of Israel.

According to Peterson, the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Lev. 8) inaugurated the sacrificial system and established the pattern on which the sacrifices would be implemented “to make atonement” (from *kipper*, Lev. 1:4; 4:20; 5:6; 6:7) for the sins of the people (Lev. 9:7–21). The first sacrifice was a sin and guilt offering to deal with the issue of sin. This was followed by the burnt and grain offering as an act of consecration to the Lord.¹² With this new endowed state of ritual holiness, Israel reaches their spiritual apex in the peace offering. Peterson states, “The peace offering could symbolize the restoration of communion or fellowship with God and with others in the community of his people.”¹³ This interpretation is confirmed by the word used for “peace offering,” *shelamim*, which is based on the word *shalom*, meaning “peace.” In other words, the sacrificial system was intended to consecrate the people of God (i.e., make them holy) so that they could come before the presence of their holy God in order to engage in an intimate act of fellowship, the sharing of a meal.¹⁴ This work of atonement is also the basis for why Israel was called to “declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among the peoples” (Ps. 96:3; cf. Ps. 57:9 = 108:3; 105:1).

CONCLUSION

Through the study of key words related to the worship life of ancient Israel, several prominent concepts arise. During their tenure in the land of Canaan, the Israelites were called to embark on a sacred journey three times a year (Exod. 23; Lev. 23) to “seek” the Lord to worship at his presence

10. For further reading in the book of Leviticus, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3; *Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3a; *Leviticus 23–27*, AB 3b (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001); and Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

11. Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 39.

12. Cf. Leviticus 14:31 for the same order concerning uncleanness due to leprosy; 15:30 for uncleanness caused by bodily emissions.

13. Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 39.

14. For further support on the significance of this order in the sacrificial system, see Anson Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts,” *Biblica* 51 (1970): 485–98.

within the sacred structure of his temple that he himself designed. Prior to this era of Canaanite settlement, such a journey was not necessary since the sacred structure of the tabernacle traveled with them during their long forty-year trek to their promised homeland. One could say, however, that the entire wilderness era was a journey to Canaan, where the Lord planned to establish “his name for his dwelling” (Deut. 12:5). Regardless, the names of these sacred places of worship express both the transcendence and imminence of the God of Israel.

Whether within a mobile tent or a permanent temple, Israel was called to “bow down” in worship before their God. The Levites were especially called on to “serve” the tabernacle/temple. In a general sense, such a call was placed upon every Israelite to live a life of “service” to the Lord with all their heart and soul. Within these sacred structures, the most significant act of worship was done—namely, the sacrificing of animals/grain. This system was the means by which the people were made holy so that they could draw near to their holy God in peace. Such peace is only a glimpse, however, of the true “peace with God” that comes only “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Averbeck, Richard E. “Tabernacle.” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, 807–27. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Barr, James. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Friedman, Richard E. “Tabernacle.” In *ABD* 6:292–300.
- Hill, Andrew E. *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church*. 1993. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- Kiuchi, Nobuyoshi. *Leviticus*. AOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1–16*. AB 3. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- _____. *Leviticus 17–22*. AB 3a. New York: Doubleday, 2000.
- _____. *Leviticus 23–27*. AB 3b. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Peterson, David. *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Rainey, Anson. “The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts.” *Bib* 51 (1970): 484–98.
- Torrey, C. C. “Armageddon.” *HTR* 31 (1938): 237–48.

CHAPTER 2
ROYAL PRIESTS
CREATED TO WORSHIP
Worship in the Garden . . . and Beyond

William R. Osborne

*“The assumption that God exists is
the Old Testament’s greatest gift to mankind.”*

CONTEXT OF WORSHIP IN CREATION

In the beginning, God existed. However, he not only existed but also spoke. He created, calling forth reality in holy utterances that forever linked the divine word to the world that it produced. The first chapter of Genesis records God’s mighty voice commanding the universe, along with its prompt obedience. Waters divide, mountains explode from the seas, the swarming things swarm, the growing things bloom, and God says that it is all *good!* In response to the “formless and empty” (*tohu wabohu*) state of the world (Gen. 1:2), the chapter demonstrates God’s work in forming what was formless and filling what was empty, with climactic emphasis being placed on the creation of humanity—his image bearers.¹

1. *Epigraph.* Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd (London: Lutterworth, 1957; repr. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002), 19.

While the narrative clearly moves the reader toward the holy and blessed seventh day, McConville notes that the structure of the seven-day account is not completely symmetrical: “The sixth day of creation is substantially longer than those of the other days. In narrative terms, the story slows down and becomes expansive. . . . There is a particular focus on the subject matter of the sixth day, on which God creates humans” (J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God’s Image: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity* [Grand Rapids: Baker

The reader is introduced to this pinnacle of creation on day six in Genesis 1:26, when God declares, “Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness.” The verses that follow help provide a clearer description, albeit a brief one, of what it means to be made in God’s image. The Lord first commissions his creatures to rule as his vice regents over all creation (v. 26) and then blesses them to multiply and fill the earth in verse 28. The universal scope of chapter 1 presents humanity through the functional lens of dominion—both categorically and numerically. Humanity’s rule was to reflect the character of the Creator.

While the text does not explicitly speak to a relational aspect of the *imago Dei* (image of God) in chapter 1, many have noted that the language of “image” and “likeness” encountered in Genesis denotes a unique status and is not unusual in its broader ancient Near Eastern context. Robin Routledge writes, “This idea is reflected elsewhere in the ANE, where the expression ‘the image of god’ might be applied to kings, as the earthly representatives of the deity. God has created human beings with the authority and responsibility to rule over his world on his behalf.”² However, the relationship extends outward because as God relates to his image bearers, his image bearers are to relate to all creation as his representatives. The *imago Dei* simultaneously speaks to substantive, functional, relational, and representative realities that are unique to men and women in God’s created order.

Genesis 1, while failing to satisfy many of our modern scientific queries,³ reveals several undeniable theological truths about our Creator and his creation. First, all that exists finds its source in God (cf. John 1:3). God is the only necessary being that exists; all else is fundamentally contingent on his existence. Unlike many comparable ancient texts, the Hebrew Scriptures offer no origin story for God (called a theogony). Second, as the Creator and Sustainer of creation, God is sovereign over its boundaries and aims, including humanity (cf. Acts 17:24–27). Human beings exist because God does, and therefore all anthropologies are necessarily theological anthropologies. We can only understand what it means to be human in that we understand how we were created to reflect the image of our Creator. Third, Genesis 1 reveals that these two—God and his image bearers—were designed to live in relationship with one another. God did not create the world to only observe it as a cosmic spectator. Fourth, God infused the cosmos with his character not only through creating humans

Academic, 2016], 13). So also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 38.

2. Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2013), 140.

3. To say that Genesis 1 is a premodern text written about the creation of the world is not to say that it is false, mythical, or inadequate. The simple fact is that Genesis was not written to answer modern scientific questions, and many of the debates swirling around Genesis 1–3 are probing an ancient text with modern questions. I believe the best way to begin any reading of the creation account is to first read it on its own terms and in its own context, historically, literarily, and theologically.

in his image but also through blessing and sanctifying time—namely, the seventh day. This act of commemoration is woven throughout Israel’s story as God’s Sabbath, by which “God and his creatures share in the celebration of his good creation, and God’s people are enjoined to enter into the rhythm of work and joyful rest.”⁴

The early chapters of Genesis are foundational to the Christian faith. Like a ramp launching a stunt rider through the air, these early chapters establish the trajectory we follow through the rest of the biblical narrative. Allen Ross aptly notes the connection between the creation account and Christian worship: “The first two chapters of the Bible provide an unparalleled revelation of the LORD, who is the majestic and sovereign God of creation. This revelation is not only foundational to the faith but is also essential for worship: The LORD God alone must be worshipped because he is sovereign over all things—he was before all things, and by him all things exist.”⁵ As people living in a world shaped and distorted by sin, a regular revisiting of the created design for worship revealed in the Eden narrative is beneficial, if not necessary. Turning our attention to worship in the garden of Eden, we can observe characteristics of worship established between God and man in this primeval time that reverberate throughout the Scriptures and the rest of human history.

THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP IN THE GARDEN

Worship is always carried out as a creaturely response to the divine initiative of the sovereign Creator. Worship exists because God exists and he created people for his glory. Ultimately, we only come to know God’s initial will for his people through the opening chapters of Genesis, and it is to these chapters that we now turn. Careful study of the garden narrative in Genesis 2 reveals three important theological themes that can guide our reflection on how this pre-fallen state of being sets a trajectory for humanity’s relationship with God. As creatures made in his image, we come to know and worship God relationally (creation and relation), within a certain location (creation and location), and finally with a purpose or telos (creation and vocation). These themes then serve as a foundation for the significance of biblical worship as humanity moves beyond the garden and into the *world*.

Creation and Relation

The garden narrative begins in Genesis 2:4 with an important narrative formula: “these are the generations . . .” (*eleh toledot*) encountered in ten other locations in Genesis (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The *toledot* formulas serve as a significant literary feature shaping

4. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 179.

5. Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006), 78.

the structure of the book, and the reference in 2:4 provides a formulaic introduction to the garden narrative in chapter 2.⁶ However, with the narrative break in chapter 1, the reader need not be confused as to whether this is a separate creation account. Nahum Sarna notes, “Chapter 2 is not another creation story. As such it would be singularly incomplete. In fact, it presupposes a knowledge of much of the preceding account of Creation. Many of the leading ideas in the earlier account are here reiterated, though the mode of presentation is different. Thus, in both narratives God is the sovereign Creator, and the world is the purposeful product of His will.”⁷

The account after 2:4 focuses the reader’s attention on the events described in day six of the previous chapter, highlighting the terrestrial nature of humanity and showing how those events relate to the following account of human origins.⁸ Verse 5 explains that we were made *for* the earth (“and there was no man to work the ground”), while verse 7 reveals we were made *from* it (“then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground”). His making of the man and the woman seems to be a deliberate act of God drawing near and engaging with his good world. Humanity was made for the world but also made for God.

The man is described as a “living creature” because God breathed the “breath of life” into the man he formed. If Genesis 1 depicts the Creator as the majestic, reality-speaking, universe-making God, then chapter 2 demonstrates that such power does not necessitate distance (a stark contrast from religious notions of the ancient world). With intimacy and care, God forms the man by breathing into his nostrils his life-giving breath. This same concern and precision characterizes the creation of woman also, as God takes a rib from the man and creates Eve to be a suitable partner and helper for Adam. Genesis 1:26–28 describes both male and female as being made in God’s image, and the picture of intimacy and closeness is further illustrated in the narrative of chapter 2. The essence of humanity is not found in autonomy, but in right relation to our Creator.

Creation and Location

After describing the creation of humanity, the narrative turns to describe a garden planted by the Lord God in Eden.⁹ While frequently referred to as “the garden of Eden,” leading many listeners to assume that Eden and the garden are one and the same, the text describes the setting as “a garden *in* Eden.” Genesis 2:8 tells us that “the LORD God planted” this garden,

6. See Sarah Schwartz, “Narrative *Toledot* Formulae in Genesis: The Case of Heaven and Earth, Noah, and Isaac,” *JHebS* 16 (2016): DOI:10.5508/jhs.2016.v16.a8.

7. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 16.

8. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, 191.

9. Generally, no attempt is made by scholars at arriving at a historic location of the actual garden. The reference to the “east” has prompted some to offer conjectures about locations in Mesopotamia. However, the prominent mountain-garden theme in the ancient Near East and OT makes precision an impossibility.

thereby setting up and establishing its design, inhabitants, and boundaries (both geographical and moral). In a special act of creation, God creates a place for his creatures to dwell and flourish in his good world.

Trees both beautiful and fruitful sprung up from the ground, including the enigmatic tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The description of the vegetation in the garden is life-giving and sustaining compared to the “thorns and thistles” outside the garden that would wage war against the man in his post-fallen state.¹⁰ Verse 10 describes a river that flowed out of Eden, seeming to divide into four large branches once it nourished the garden. One thing is clear: the Lord God is a gardening God.

At first glance, as a modern interpreter, the mention of God planting a garden might simply seem like a quirky divine hobby. However, when compared with the literature and imagery of the ancient Near East, the planting of a garden is highly significant.¹¹ From Babylon to Ugarit, myths associating various deities with garden dwellings encircled the ancient world.¹² Analyzing several divine-garden texts in the ancient Near East, Howard Wallace provides the following important similarities to the Eden narrative in Genesis 2, such as (1) unmediated presence of the deity; (2) the issuing of divine decrees; (3) the source of subterranean, life-giving water; abundant fertility; and (4) trees of supernatural qualities and beauty.¹³

Gardens also played a significant role in and around ancient temples and royal palaces.¹⁴ Ancient Mesopotamian kings frequently gave reports of the luxurious and expansive nature of their royal gardens. Sennacherib’s annals read:

By divine will, vines, all kinds of fruit trees, olive trees, and aromatic trees flourished greatly in (those) gardens. . . . I created a marsh to moderate the flow of water for (those) gardens and had a canebrake planted (in it).¹⁵

The annals go on to describe the abundance of wildlife that flourished in the royal park in a way that is not dissimilar to the portrait painted in the biblical narrative. Frequently, royal building projects would also include the construction and consecration of temples, temple gardens, and palaces. The garden was a mini-cosmos established by the king for the deity

10. Howard N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, HSM 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 70–71.

11. Reading the Eden narrative alongside the traditions of the ancient Near East is not intended to diminish the historical veracity of the account, but to wrestle with the significance of the text for its original ancient audience.

12. Wallace, *Eden Narrative*, 70–89.

13. Howard N. Wallace, “Garden of God,” in *ABD* 2:907.

14. See William R. Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel’s Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*, BBRSup 18 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 31–75.

15. A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)*, Part 1, RINAP 3/1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 51–52.

that represented world order and creative power (cf. Eccl. 2:1–11). The opulence and beauty of the garden served as the backdrop for divine-human interactions transpiring between deity and king,¹⁶ and as noted earlier, kings were also described as being the “image” of the deity on earth, or the offspring of a deity. Adam and Eve were commissioned in Genesis 1:28 to serve as YHWH’s royal vice regents, exercising his cosmic agenda in his royal garden as his image bearers. And later on in chapter 2, Adam exercises his creative dominion by naming all other living things.

The garden in Eden was not simply green space; it was sacred space. It was the place established by God for his interactions with humanity. This notion of sacred space resurfaces throughout the book of Genesis as we see God call the leaders of a new nation to a new land. In Genesis 12:7–8 we read, “Then the LORD appeared to Abram. . . . So he [Abram] built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”¹⁷ The altar marked out a location where God had made himself known to his people, and it also commemorated the event that took place at this location (cf. Gen. 35:7). However, this activity indicated more than the patriarch’s penchant for construction projects. As Richard Hess notes, “Noah, Abram, and the successive leaders of his family built altars, made sacrifices, and functioned in the role of priests.”¹⁸ These pockets of sacred space, initiated by God in theophanies and commemorated by men with altars, created new opportunities for the leaders of God’s people to call on the name of YHWH, intercede for their families, and worship the living and active God.

As Abram’s little family grew into a great nation, the trappings of Israel’s sacred space would change from tabernacle to temple. However, images of the garden continue to reappear. Gordon Wenham has pointed out the archetypal nature of the garden for later institutions of Israel’s worship noting the following: (1) God walked in the garden (Gen. 3:8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6–7); (2) cherubim were present east of the garden and in the tabernacle and temple with the entrance being from the east (1 Kings 6:23–28; Exod. 26:31); (3) the tabernacle menorah was possibly a stylized

16. D. J. Wiseman, “Palace and Temple Gardens in the Ancient Near East,” in *Monarchies and Socio-religious Traditions in the Ancient Near East*, ed. T. Mikasa, Bulletin of the Middle East Center in Japan 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), 37–43.

17. The first record of YHWH-directed worship through altar worship is in Genesis 8:20, when we are told that Noah built an altar after the flood and worshiped YHWH. Other accounts of altar building in Genesis include 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 5. It is quite interesting that these first altars built by Abram were in close proximity to noteworthy trees: the oak of Moreh (12:8) and the oaks of Mamre (13:18). The first is located near Shechem, where we are told resided a large stand of trees that is later mentioned in Genesis 35:4, when Jacob buries idols there, and it seems to be the tree that stood “in the sanctuary of YHWH” where the stone was erected in Joshua 24:26 (see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961], 279). It is possible that these divine encounters at sacred sites associated with trees are theological and cultural echoes ringing out of humanity’s beginnings with God in a garden.

18. Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 193.

image of the tree of life; (4) the description of the man's job in the garden to "work and keep it" is the same as the priest's job description (see Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6); (5) the river watering the garden is comparable to the river in Ezekiel's temple vision in Ezekiel 47; and (6) the sacred items and decorations of the tabernacle and temple are prefigured.¹⁹ These intentional reappearances of the garden imagery in Israel's priestly traditions warrant our thinking of the garden less as a paradisiacal botanical reserve to more of a temple-garden. The garden was not simply an ancient arboretum for human flourishing; it was the dwelling place of God with man. And in this garden we see God's plans for his creatures and the world.

Creation and Vocation

Human beings have been striving for millennia to unlock the meaning of life, from the ancient epics of man versus the gods to Douglas Adams's much less compelling "42" in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Most long to know their purposes in this world, and the garden narrative suggests that mankind's purpose is actually a calling—a glorious, priestly, co-reigning calling. Genesis 2:15 says that after God completed his garden project he "took the man and placed him in the garden to work it and watch over it."²⁰ This was the man's vocation, or calling, placed on him by his Creator. As highlighted by Wenham, the verbs describing the man's duties in the garden are not insignificant. The verbs *abad* (to work) and *shamar* (to guard) are found together describing the work of the priests in the tabernacle in the book of Numbers. T. D. Alexander writes, "Because they met God face to face in a Holy Place, we may assume that Adam and Eve had a holy or priestly status. Only priests were permitted to serve within the sanctuary or temple."²¹ As priestly workers in the temple-garden, the man and woman were to serve the garden and its resident Sovereign by watching over it and cultivating it. Combining the priestly orientation of the temple-garden with the royal description of the *imago Dei* in 1:26–28, a visage of humanity emerges from Genesis 1 and 2 as royal priests commissioned to create, subdue, cultivate, and worship.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GARDEN FOR BIBLICAL WORSHIP

Worship Is Personal

Stating that worship is personal does not mean that it is purely private. The driving force of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 is that, as cre-

19. Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25. See also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 20–31.

20. Author's translation.

21. Alexander, *From Eden to New Jerusalem*, 25.

ated beings, our relationship to the sovereign Lord of the universe is not merely a matter of personal preference! We live in a culture that frequently divides the subjective and objective along the lines of what is considered private and public. Seemingly objective areas like math and science can be discussed in the public arena, but religion or worship is considered a “personal matter” and should not be permitted public or corporate discussion.

Through God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures we come to know a person—more specifically three persons with one essence. As God breathes the breath of life into the lungs of his image bearers, he endows them with the necessary abilities to live in relationship to himself. God is not an otherworldly “it” to be studied or examined. He is not another created entity to be explored and subdued.

There is only one being in existence worthy of our worship. When we allow any other thing in existence to sit on the throne of our hearts, we immediately align ourselves with Paul’s dismal assessment of humanity in Romans 1:25: “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

As a personal God, he is known and loved in much the same way we come to know and love another person. He is knowable to his creatures because he reveals himself to them. In a self-motivated act of disclosure, the Creator creates and initiates the relationship with his creatures. The man and the woman come to know God truly, and they can only respond to him rightly so long as they know him truly. We generally do not love—much less worship—things or persons we do not know. The relational and personal nature of the covenant-making God of creation grounds worship in the epistemological as much as the existential. Indeed, our experiences in relation to other persons are often shaped and formed by what we know about them (or perceive to know about them). And what we know about God comes through his revelation of himself through creation, Holy Writ, and—ultimately—the incarnation.

Worship Is Active

While the garden narrative in Genesis is certainly less than comprehensive, the role of humanity in response to God was intended to be one of activity. They were to *do* things—have children, exercise dominion, cultivate a temple-garden, and obey. Peter Leithart writes, “*Worship is an act not an attitude*. The vocabulary of worship in the Bible emphasizes this, for the biblical words are all active, with literal meanings like ‘bow down’ and ‘serve.’”²² In a culture in which we often associate worship with a passive “being present” in a worship service where we often spend the majority of our time looking at a person or a screen, the active nature of worship is an important corrective. Leithart helpfully connects the active nature of

22. Peter J. Leithart, “Transforming Worship,” *Foundations* 38 (1997): 28.

our worship to our creaturely status: “God made us as physical beings and that, the Lord himself declared, is a good thing. It is so good for us to have bodies that we will have bodies forever. There is no biblical reason whatsoever for being ashamed of having a body, for thinking that our bodiliness is somehow a detriment to communion with God, or for feeling that, to be close to God, we have to shed our bodies or at least pretend they are not there. Less bodily worship is not more pleasing to God than more bodily worship and Paul says that our true spiritual worship involves offering our bodies.”²³ Ultimately, the downfall of our first parents played out in an improper action. While there were obvious intellectual and emotive precursors to the act of taking the fruit, the ultimate judgment was reserved for the completed deed, not the temptation. Worship is not simply a feeling experienced during a song, nor is it double-mindedly believing the right things about God while ignoring his revealed Word (see James 1:8, 22–25). Spiritual worship is not spiritual because it carries us away from this world, but because the Holy Spirit is breaking into this present world and transforming the created minds, wills, affections, and actions of those united with Christ by faith.

Worship Is Comprehensive

The active nature of worship means not only that our worship should be active but also that all of our activities should be worshipful. When God placed man in the garden to care for it, this was his God-given vocation—that is, his job. The man was created for a purpose, and when he lived that purpose out faithfully as YHWH’s royal priest in his temple-garden, everything he did was act of worship. Despite many of our Monday-morning sentiments, work is not an unintended product of human rebellion against God; it is a part of God’s good design for the world. In a pre-fall world, caring for plants, naming animals, and even the sexual relationship between Adam and Eve were worshipful acts of obedience to mankind’s image-bearing vocation. Not only are we to be active within the compartments of worship we have instituted in our lives and cultures; we must allow the comprehensive nature of our relationship with the Creator to affect all of our activities (see 1 Cor. 10:31).²⁴

For many in our complex modern society it is difficult to recognize the worshipful aspects of our various occupations. Sometimes this is because we fail to see the connection between our jobs—which we do to make money to live—and our God-given calling as image bearers in God’s good world. While there are some ways that people can make money that are deeply immoral and feed on the brokenness of humanity, many people

23. Leithart, “Transforming Worship,” 29.

24. See James M. Todd III, “Edenic Endeavors: Sacred Service in the Garden of Eden,” *Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World—Faithful Work* 1 (2016): 11–20, <http://images.cofu.edu/cofo/about/FaithfulLivesFaithfulWork.pdf>.

make a living in various kinds of service industries, providing goods and services for those willing and able to offer payment. Even the burgeoning technological field creatively offers novel ways of rearranging, reordering, and ultimately subduing (i.e., making more convenient) aspects of the created world. When we are engaged in these image-bearing activities of creating, reordering, and subduing, the question of worship arises not so much from the nature of the task but the motivations and orientation of the heart. When we create things (like stringing words together in a chapter), for whom are we working? When we interject new order into the world, to whose standard are we seeking to conform? As Christians, we can indeed offer up every area of our lives as worship when we recognize our image-bearing role as royal priests employed as ambassadors for God's reconciliation program (2 Cor. 18–20).

Worship Is Responsive

There is no greater scene of divine initiative than creation, and worship is fundamentally the proper anthropological response to theological disclosure. All that Adam and Eve are to do is in direct response to the immediate revelation of the divine "Thou." In fact, God's activity in creation provoked Israel's psalmists to worship over and over again, with Psalm 33 being one example:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

(Ps. 33:6–9)

In these verses the responsive nature of worship emerges. All of the earth should fear God and be in awe of him because "he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded and it stood firm." The very act of creation and the majesty revealed therein should prompt universal worship. However, the previous verse shows not only that such worship is grounded in God's raw power revealed in creation but also the value and character of his work:

For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

(Ps. 33:5)

Creation reveals both God's greatness and his goodness, and both should lead us to respond rightly with worship as his creatures.

Worship Is in God's Presence

In the garden, God spoke directly with the man and woman with no need for mediation. Humanity was created for direct access to the presence of God, and it was only because of the rebellion of our first parents that such access would be severed. The garden was designed as God's dwelling place with humanity, and the presence of God remains a central theme throughout the rest of the Bible. From theophanies in the desert to smoke filling the temple, Israel's worship orbited around manifestations of YHWH's presence. God delivered his covenant people out of Egypt in order to bring them to himself (Exod. 19:4), and Moses would not depart from Mt. Sinai without the presence of the Lord: "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" (Exod. 33:15–16). God's presence resided in the Holy of Holies in the center of Israel's camp when all the tribes of Israel traveled through the wilderness (Num. 1:47–2:2). Centuries later in Israel's history the presence of YHWH would fill Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:11), only to depart it on the brink of Babylonian destruction due to the wickedness of the people (Ezek. 1:4–28; 8:1–10:22). Just like the eastward exit from Eden (Gen. 3:24), God's glory would depart eastward from the temple (Ezek. 10:18–19) and his people would depart to the east of his holy city to the city of Babylon.²⁵

While prophets like Ezekiel and Isaiah hold out hope for a future time when God will dwell once again with his people (see Ezek. 48:35; Isa. 65:17–25), it is not until the incarnation of Christ that we see God once again dwelling so closely among his image bearers. The gospel of John describes this as the preexistent Word taking on human flesh and dwelling (i.e., "tabernacling") among humanity so that they can see his glory, full of grace and truth (1:14). The divine presence of the garden, Old Testament tabernacle, and temple is now a man walking around Galilee.

For this reason, Jesus denounces the legitimacy of the temple as the central feature of worship for God's people (Mark 13; John 2:18–22; 4:20–26), and instead presents himself as the way to proper worship of the Father (John 5:19–24). In the Old Testament Scriptures worship was inseparably tied to the tragic reality of Adam and Eve's rebellion and sin,

25. Werner Berg identifies the garden of Eden a prototype (*Urbild*) for the land of Canaan. However, the theological significance of the garden in later Israelite perspective does not necessitate the garden story as a later etiological invention. See Werner Berg, "Israels Land, der Garten Gottes: Der Garten als Bild des Heiles im Alten Testament," in *Das Kleid der Erde: Pflanzen in der Lebenswelt des Alten Israel*, eds. Ute Neumann-Gorsolke and Peter Riede (Stuttgart: Calwer, 2002), 75–76.

and in the New Testament Scriptures worship is inseparably linked to the redemptive cross-work of the second Adam (see Rom. 5:12–17).

While Christians presently worship separated from the bodily presence of the resurrected Christ, the apostle Paul instructs us that we have received the firstfruits of our eternal inheritance—the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9–25). And this abiding Spirit is building the people of God into a living temple, built on the cornerstone of Christ, the foundation of the prophets and apostles, so that God may dwell once again with his people (Eph. 2:19–22). The church worships now as the already/not-yet kingdom citizens who live under the reign of God yet are separated from their true homeland. Because of Jesus Christ—the second Adam—God’s people will one day dwell in his presence, worshipping their Maker forever.

WORSHIP IN THE FUTURE GARDEN

The divine-human relationship described in Genesis 1–2 is paradigmatic for all of Israel’s encounters with her God in the Old Testament. The notion of God as sovereign Creator who formed a people for himself to dwell with him in a sacred space undergirds the entire Old Testament.²⁶ However, this theological thread extends across the canon, culminating in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The work of Christ forever changed the way God’s people would dwell in his presence. The idyllic worship of the first garden finds its ultimate fulfillment and embodiment in a future garden-city described in Revelation 22.

In the final chapter of John’s vision, the apostle is taken to a garden and a river flowing through the new Jerusalem and issuing forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1). The tree of life once again appears, though interestingly there seem to be multiple trees with one on each side of the river. The throne is not located in a temple, but is simply found in the city because there is no need for a temple when the glory of the Lord fills the streets. Similar to the man’s original commission in the garden of Eden, John records that the servants of the Lord will worship him before his throne, seeing him face-to-face (vv. 3–4). As Ross states, “What is ‘new’ about all of this is the reality of the presence of God with people. The waiting will finally be over, the alienation and separation ended.”²⁷

The word translated “worship” (*latreuō*) in verse 3 is the same word used to translate the work of the Levites in Numbers 8:28. The holy, consecrated, and priestly nature of our worship established in the first garden will not be done away with in the future garden-city; it will be perfected. John’s final vision not only alludes back to the priestly nature of humanity’s creation mandate but also reiterates the royal role we are intending to play in God’s good design. Verse 5 describes the citizens of the garden-city, stating, “and

26. This is aptly captured in Graeme Goldsworthy’s definition of the kingdom of God as “God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule and blessing.”

27. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 496.

they will reign forever and ever.” However, there is no threat of usurpation or abuse of power in this new garden for all evil will have been eradicated.

Seated on the throne, God’s reign and order will be universally established through the new heavens and the new earth—his kingdom will be on earth as it was in heaven. The worship of God’s people will once again comprehensively embrace all areas of life as they exercise dominion over the new heavens and new earth. Revelation 21:2–3 summarize the perfection of Christian worship achieved in God’s future cosmic sacred space: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008.
- Berg, Werner. “Israel’s Land, der Garten Gottes: Der Garten als Bild des Heiles im Alten Testament.” In *Das Kleid der Erde: Pflanzen in der Lebenswelt des Alten Israel*, edited by Ute Neumann-Gorsolke and Peter Riede, 61–79. Stuttgart: Calwer, 2002.
- Grayson, A. Kirk, and Jamie Novotny. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1*. RINAP 3/1. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012.
- Hess, Richard S. *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Köhler, Ludwig. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by A. S. Todd. London: Lutterworth, 1957. Reprint, Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002.
- Leithart, Peter J. “Transforming Worship.” *Foundations* 38 (1997): 27–34.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1–11:26*. NAC 1a. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996.
- McConville, J. Gordon. *Being Human in God’s Image: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Osborne, William R. *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel’s Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*. BBRSup 18. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018.
- Ross, Allen P. *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006.
- Routledge, Robin. *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2013.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: JPS, 1989.
- Schwartz, Sarah. “Narrative *Toledot* Formulae in Genesis: The Case of Heaven and Earth, Noah, and Isaac.” *JHebS* 16 (2016): DOI:10.5508/jhs.2016.v16.a8.

- Todd, James M., III. "Edenic Endeavors: Sacred Service in the Garden of Eden." *Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World—Faithful Work* 1 (2016): 11–20.
- Vaux, Roland de. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.
- Wallace, Howard N. *The Eden Narrative*. HSM 32. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.
- _____. "Garden of God." In *ABD* 2:906–7.
- Wenham, Gordon J. "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story." In *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible, 19–25*. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986.
- _____. *Genesis 1–15*. WBC 1. Waco, TX: Word, 1987.
- Wiseman, Donald J. "Palace and Temple Gardens in the Ancient Near East." In *Monarchies and Socio-religious Traditions in the Ancient Near East*, edited by T. Mikasa, 37–43. *Bulletin of the Middle East Center in Japan* 1. Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1984.