

The Long and Winding Road Worship: From Inception to Today

Worship is older than time itself. Before the creation of the universe, the angels existed with God.¹ The angels are a group of beings, who among other things, exist to bring glory and honor to the name of God—to worship. Unlike human beings, who were created with the ability to exercise freewill, the angels must worship/obey God in all things, all the time. Swift and permeant judgement, without the opportunity of grace, comes to any angel who rebels or disobeys God.

The angel, Lucifer (Satan or the Devil, as he is also known), is an example of an angel who countered God. As a result, he was cast away from the presence of God and doomed to the state of that separation.² Revelation 12 contains the final story of this one who attempted to usurp worship from the only One truly worthy of worship. His defeat is certain and of it he is fully aware. If more examples of doomed angels are required, one-third also rebelled with Satan and share His final judgement.

Later during creation, the commands of God were immediately obeyed. As God spoke, each command was perfectly fulfilled. For six days, God formed and filled, resulting in the universe we know today. Through strict and immediate obedience, worship occurred in each step of creation. Furthermore, creation continues to worship God by doing exactly what it was created to do. Psalm 19 explains how creation is perfectly worshipping:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

On the sixth day, God's most prized creation came into being: mankind. This was the first time a race of beings existed with the option to obey or disobey, to worship or to scorn, to have freewill.

¹ Job 38:4-7

² Isaiah 14:12-14

Words for Worship

Shachah

The most prevalent Hebrew verb for “worship” in the Old Testament is Shachah (שָׁחָה, Strong’s number 7812). It is translated worship, to bow down, to pay homage, prostrate oneself.³ The Biblical uses of this word demonstrate that it is not only used to refer people paying honor and glory to God, but also there are many uses of people honoring and respecting other people. Moses worshipped his father-in-law and we see that Abigail worshipped David (Exodus 18:7 and 1 Samuel 25:23, respectively).⁴

Proskuneo

Similarly, in the New Testament, the Greek word proskuneo (προσκυνέω, Strong’s number 4352) is most often used for the word “worship.” It is a compound Greek word comprised of *pros* (to or toward) and *kuneo* (to kiss).⁵ In the New Testament, it carries the idea of bowing down, to kiss the hand, to worship and revere.

Weorthscipe

We get our English word “worship” from the old English word, “*Weorthscipe*.” It conveys the idea of ascribing worth to someone or something deserving.⁶ It is literally worth-ship, like friendship. Some argue that our English worship-word and its etymology fall flat in regard to actualizing honor and reverence to God.⁷ Nevertheless, this definition is revitalized as one focuses on HOW to ascribe worth to the deserving agent.

Actions of Worship

In our current culture, many people equate music with worshipping. Singing is the preferred form of honoring God and praising His name. Although I agree that music is a viable form of worshipping God, I have said it is, in my opinion, one of the lowest forms of acceptable worship. Don’t get me wrong, I love music and enjoy singing praises to God. I love the theology in hymns and to be reminded of the great things God has done and is yet to do for mankind and for me personally! But I cannot help but realize how easy it is to take someone else’s words/melody to respect and revere my Creator God and Savior. SO,

³ Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Shachah".

⁴ Gallagher, Dan. "Truth or Tradition: What is True Biblical Worship?" November 2015.

⁵ Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Proskuneo".

⁶ "Worship." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d.

⁷ Gleddiesmith, Stacey. "Worship Theology 101: What’s In A Word." April 25, 2011.

I will certainly keep singing, but I want to explore more personal and higher ways to worship God.

The Importance of Worship⁸

Scripture is replete in revealing how important it is to worship and to worship correctly. As a high school sophomore, I read a book by John MacArthur called, Worship: The Ultimate Priority. It was recommended by my Youth Minister, Steve Rymer. I was not looking to read a book, but out of submission to my ministry leader (which later I find out is a great way to worship God), I open this book and it began to answer huge questions in my life that I did not even know I was asking. Life, church, and “worship” began to make some sense; it was just what I needed at that time.

One of my biggest “ah ha” moments in the book were some Biblical anecdotes delineating the priority of worshipping God compared to other good and needed things in life. First, the Israelite’s camp as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting where God manifested Himself and where Israel worshipped was right smack-dab in the center of the camp. The Levites, those who served/worked in the Tabernacle and led worship camped around the Tabernacle. Then the rest of the Israelites camped outside of the Levites.

Another example of priority is seen in the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11. Verse 4 recognizes Abel who worshipped with the right heart. Verse 5 mentions Enoch, who walked with God in a special way. Verse 7 names Noah and bragged on the way he worked for a century or so on a boat that was never before needed in the history of mankind. Perhaps these three celebrities show a priority of worship, walking with God, working with God. I will be the first to say that this breaks down quickly, but maybe God is giving us a nugget on how to prioritize our lives’ activities.

It is interesting to look at the age qualifications the God assigned to certain services. One had to be at least twenty to serve in the military (Numbers 1:3). Twenty-five was the age that a Levite could legally begin working in the Tabernacle (Numbers 8:24). However, thirty years old was the marker for a Levite to begin serving as a priest and leading others in worship (Numbers 4:3). Even the law (The Torah), pointed to the priority of worship.

Finally, the Seraphim, the angelic beings worshipping God and tending to Isaiah in the Temple in Isaiah 6. Later, I will talk more about this occasion in regard to worship, but it has a quick quip to say about worship’s priority. These angels had 3 pair of wings, and with one pair, they flew allowing service. The final 2 pair of wings demonstrated worship: 2 wings they used to cover their feet and 2 wings they used to cover their face as to not look

⁸ MacArthur, John, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*. Chicago, Moody Press. 1983.

upon God. Some may think it a stretch, but I definitely can see a show of importance in the way they acted in the presence of Holy God.

The Uniqueness and Specifications of Worship

Generally speaking, God does not want worship to be plain, copied or trite. God went to great lengths to demonstrate how we, the creation, should relate to our Creator! One of the most significant things He did was to create a whole nation from scratch and therein, through real and tangible experiences, show how to love, care, commune...to worship.

In the New Testament, He goes even further, as He states in 1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Furthermore, on the subject of specificity, God uses three-fifths of the Torah (Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) to list out specific laws as to how we should relate to and love Him! He is a God Who cares about His creation and is passionate about worship.

Snapshots of Worship in Scripture

In Eden

Adam and Eve had a perfect, undefiled relationship with God which means their worship was perfect and undefiled. Many claim the duo walked with God in the cool of the day, but there is no textual reference to this activity. We do know Adam and Eve had responsibilities (ie: naming the animals, subduing the earth, being fruitful and multiplying). The cursing came when obedience stopped. This negative may say more about Worship in that obedience is key to the way we honor and esteem God. Know and do the right thing!

Cain and Abel

The first officially named story on worship stars Cain and Abel. As scripture states, the brothers worshipped in ways unique to one another and tied closely to their respective personalities and yet, the key element was the heart. God accepted Abel's sacrifice and did not accept Cain's. The problem was not so much with the action, but with the intention and motivation. In this, yet another negative, we see the passion that worship can muster; it is a big deal.

Isaiah

The quintessential Old Testament text on worship is Isaiah 6. When Isaiah went to the Temple to worship, he encountered God in an awesome and unexpected experience. Here is the text of Isaiah 6:1-9a,

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hands a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” And he said, “Go, ...”

This encounter led to Isaiah’s confession, forgiveness and then commissioning to do God’s will for his life at this time in his ministry as a prophet. This is a beautiful expression of true and deep personal worship. It was not contrived nor copied; it was unique and responsive. It required Isaiah’s desire to worship (he went to the Temple), but also necessitated his openness to receive God’s expression of Himself and to appropriately respond with humility and vulnerability.

Jesus

The quintessential New Testament text on worship is John 4. Here, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at the well. Their conversation turns to worship—a hot topic of the day. Jesus revealed that the location was not near as important as the content.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Prioritize your life to keep worship on top
2. Worship in Spirit and in Truth
3. Stay out of the rut and keep worship creative
4. The Old Covenant is gone, but keep your worship about sacrifice