

Worship Course 4 – Notes on Worship in the Bible

Part 1 – Categories of worship.

The word 'Worship' is our translation of the Hebrew word '*dabar*' which means 'to talk' or 'to recount' (ie telling of God's deeds). The Greek word is '*προσκυνεῖν*' ('*proskuneo*') which literally means 'to kiss towards' (ie blowing a kiss of love towards God?).

We traditionally identify various different aspects that come under the broader title of worship – these are offered here in alphabetical order rather than any sequence they might be used.

- Adoration (basking in who God is)
- Affirmation of Faith (Creed)
- Blessing (for worshippers / for others)
- Challenge
- Gathering & greeting
- Hearing the Word (Readings and Sermon)
- Intercession (prayer for others' needs)
- Peace (acknowledging our belonging)
- Penitence (Confession & Absolution)
- Petition (prayer for our needs)
- Praise
- Response (making commitment / offering)
- Resting in God (including Silence)
- Submission
- Thanksgiving (appreciation for what God has done)

In the Anglican church we have tended to settle into one or two sequences in which we do things, but this is not essential. BCP, especially the service of Holy Communion, majored almost exclusively on Penitence, but modern worship tends to focus more on the areas of Praise and Thanksgiving. Some might say that we over-emphasize the personal experience of God to the loss of Penitence and Adoration.

Question 1 – Thinking of your own church situation, are you aware of which categories are emphasized, and which perhaps need more attention? You might like to draft an order of service (outline only) just using some of the categories above that would suit your context.

Part 2 – Worship in the Bible

Nowhere does the Bible give us a complete picture of what is required in worship – which is just as well, otherwise we would have followed it slavishly with vain repetition. However, in various places we are given hints of various aspects. The following Bible passages are a good starting point to explore Biblical worship.

- Exodus 3 – Moses and the burning bush
- Joshua 24 – Choose this day ...
- 2 Samuel 6 – The Ark is brought to Jerusalem
- 2 Chronicles 6 – Dedicating the Temple

Nehemiah 8 & 9 – Reading the Law
Psalms 92–100 – Calls to worship
Isaiah 6 – The prophet’s vision and call
John 4 – Jesus at the well
Acts 2, 37 – 3,1 & 4, 32-37 – Early church worship
1 Corinthians 14, 26-33 – Instructions for worship
Philippians 2, 5-11 – probably an early hymn quoted
Colossians 1, 15-20 – another hymn quoted
Revelation 4 ff – examples of worship in heaven

It’s worth noting that the current theory is that the events of Pentecost and the worship of the early church all took place in the Temple courts, rather than everyone trying to squeeze into an upper room, especially once there were 3,000 of them!

Of course there are explicit instructions for creating the Tabernacle in the Pentateuch, and detailed commands about the various sacrifices, offerings, feasts and ceremonies that will be enacted there, but for the purposes of our session we will accept that the Temple has been overtaken by the one true sacrifice that was Jesus.

Basically the whole concept of worshipping is something that develops through the Bible. At the start, people have a fairly superstitious and localised view of who God might be, but they need to be shown that there is just one God, maker of heaven and earth. The next step is to understand that he is a righteous God, and that there are things that are acceptable and not acceptable – hence the giving of the Law. Once that is embedded into their lives, the people need to learn that it is not slavish adherence that matters, but the underlying concepts of righteousness and justice. Jesus then arrives on the scene, and his message includes that it is the heart that matters, not the outward observance, and that people need to be worshipping in spirit and in truth. So we can’t base our worship merely on Old Testament examples (which included sacrifice), but we need to read through the lens of Christ’s teaching.

Question 2 – Have a closer look at some of these passages, and decide which categories from section 1 are prominent in each encounter.

Part 3 – Worship and The Psalms

The book of Psalms can be seen as the hymn book of Israel, with everything from personal struggles to glorious praise in the Temple. Although Psalms used to be just read sequentially, today we tend to use them to fit the particular context and theme of our worship.

Question 3 – Try and identify at least one psalm to fit each of the categories in Part 1 above.

Something I have found helpful for preparing services is that I spent a whole retreat day with the Psalms, and prepared an index of Psalms, placing each into one or more categories such as Abiding, Advice for Life, Apparent Injustice, Blessing, Call to Worship, Confession, Confidence in God, Creation ... etc.