

## Bible teaching on Worship

### 1 – WORSHIP – THE WORDS

#### 1. HEBREW (OT)

- **WORK / SERVICE** The Hebrew word 'avad' means to work or to serve. It is what a servant does for a master. The idea is that worship is what we do for God because we owe it to Him as our Maker (e.g. Exodus 3:12). This word is often paralleled in Hebrew poetry with 'to sacrifice' ('tsavach')
- **BOW DOWN** The Hebrew word 'shachah' means 'to bow down' and is sometimes translated as 'worship'. This is what is done in awe of God: 'You are not worthy' in its proper sense. (e.g. 1 Sam 1:3)
- **FEAR** The Hebrew word 'yahre' means 'to fear'. The use of this word is rather like that of 'shachah' but it is not something that is done, it is an attitude of heart (e.g. 2 Kings 17:35). 'yahre' and 'shachah' are often paralleled in Hebrew poetry.

#### 2. GREEK (NT)

- **WORK / SERVICE** The Greek 'latreia' means rites or duties of worship, or work done in order to worship God. See John 16:2; Acts 24:14
- **BOW DOWN** The Greek word 'proskuneo' is the New Testament equivalent of to bow down – see Matt 4:9,10; John 4:20f.
- **WORSHIP – in general** The Greek 'eusebeo' and 'sebomai' refers to worship in a general sense. This is the word used by pagan people for the 'worship' of gods in general, but it also used by the NT writers of the worship of God e.g. Acts 17:23

### 2 – SOME THOUGHTS ON WORSHIP FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

**Worship was not originally done on the Sabbath** It may seem somewhat scandalous to emphasise that the Sabbath day (Gen 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11). The Forefathers worshipped when a special event took place (Noah in Genesis 8:20f. and Abraham in Gen 12:8, 22:13f.)

**Worship is the function and duty of God's people** Notably, the people of Israel were brought out of Egypt so that they could 'worship their God' (Exodus 7:16 etc.). Some believe that this was a ruse on the part of Moses, but the truth is that the Lord wanted His people to do His will, and this is what is meant by worship. They could not fulfil their purpose whilst in captivity. They could only worship God when released to live according to God's ways and laws.

**Worship was a great feast** The Old Testament describes a series of feasts at which people worshipped the Lord. All of them were agricultural festivals celebrating barley, wheat and grape harvests respectively, and called 'Passover' ('unleavened bread' - barley harvest), 'Pentecost' ('first fruits' - wheat harvest) and 'Booths' (grape harvest – ingathering of last harvest). See Exodus 23:14f. Most of these feasts lasted for a week.

**Worship as sacrifice** The sacrificial system was not linked to 'weekly services' of worship. 'Whole offerings' were linked to great events and annual harvests because the offering was given completely to God (Lev 1). They did the equivalent of putting money in a brazier and burning it! 'Fellowship offerings' (Lev 3,7) were simply a means of killing meat in a 'holy' way for eating, and all food was eaten communally. Other sacrifices were offered not so much for worship, but for sins, vows and for healing and thanksgiving – according to individual need. They were like religious ceremonies which marked key moments in people's lives.

**Worship in the Ark and the Temple** Over centuries, the people of Israel worshipped the Lord at special events, festivals and individually in the Tabernacle (where the Ark was kept) and then at the Temple. A routine of prayers and other events, such as the weekly changing of the 'bread of the presence' (see Exodus 25:30 and 1 Samuel 21:6) and also music (1 Chronicles 15:22f.)

**Worship in synagogues** In later years, after the time of the Old Testament writings, the Temple had been destroyed and repaired, but most Israelites gathered for worship in towns and cities around the Greek and then Roman Empire. They met in meeting rooms call 'synagogues'. A word meaning 'gathering of things' or 'assembly'. Worship focussed on the leadership of rabbis, prayers and reading from the scriptures and the Talmud (Babylonian and Persian commentaries on the Law from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century). **Generally done on the Sabbath.**

### 3 – SOME THOUGHTS ON WORSHIP FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Sabbath (Saturday) meeting for worship was the rule in Jesus' day** But it is astonishing that the early Christian community decided to meet for worship not on the Sabbath, but on the first working day of the week – **SUNDAY**. People find it hard to accept that the Christian community does NOT worship on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week, set aside as the 'first fruits' of our weekly effort. Tradition alone has shifted the word Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday – as far as Christians are concerned.

**Our worship shows our allegiance** Jesus was tempted by the devil to "worship" Him (bow down). He refused, but the incident reminds us that the Devil constantly demands something of those who are not dedicated to God. It is not easy to escape His clutches (Matt 4:8-11)

**The New Testament gives no specific guidance on WHEN we worship, but assumes weekly.** The weekly worship gathering of Christian communities in the early church is documented as taking place on a variety of days, and is the setting of all Paul's comments on Worship – notable 1 Corinthians 14.

**Jesus' most extensive comments on worship are to be found in John 4** It is fascinating that Jesus reserved His most powerful comments about worship for a conversation with a Samaritan woman, perhaps pointing the way to a new worship not bound by the strictures of the Jewish synagogue. **IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH**

**What do we do in worship?** It appears that the early Christians took the example of the synagogue and worshipped weekly using prayers and scripture (as in 1 Cor 14:26), but added two things:

- **preaching and teaching** because this was the means whereby the Gospel was propagated. Note that much of what Paul discusses as prophecy is in fact the art of preaching. Prophecy is declaring the Lord's Word (whether after a tongue has been spoken or not) See 1 Cor 14:6f.
- **The 'Lord's Supper'** or 'breaking of bread' – in remembrance of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-26) It seems that the shared meal was a common feature of the gathering of Christians – see 1 Cor. 11.

**Paul lays great emphasis on the duty of public teaching and exhortation** For this, see 1 Timothy 4:6-16. Again, this was part of the work of the church to try and explain itself to a world which did not believe. The Jews had failed in their task of bringing God's news of salvation to the world, but the Church embraced this in evangelism and proclamation. (see also Romans 10:14-17).

**Music and Worship** Little is said in the New Testament, but it is repeated by Paul that the worship of God should be accompanied by 'hymns, psalms and spiritual songs' (Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16). Please note the following

- **Psalms** are the hymn book of the Bible and they are the 'Word of God', so we do not have to worry about the correctness of the words used.
- **Hymns** are the poetry of the church – theology set to music. They can be as old as 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven', or as new as 'Take us to the river' or 'In Christ alone'
- **Spiritual songs** are the simple songs and choruses with easy to remember words, which have a simple focus on Christ and praise; 'Faithful One' 'We bow down' 'Jesus be the centre'

**ADDENDUM** please also note that there is a difference between all these congregational types of song and 'performance' song. Musicians know full well that some things can be sung by large numbers, and some can only be sung by artistes.

## REFERENCES FOR WORSHIP

**Genesis 2:2-3** <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

**Genesis 8:20** <sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

**Genesis 12:8** <sup>8</sup> From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD.

**Exodus 3:11-12** <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

**Exodus 20:8-11** <sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work -- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

**Exodus 23:14-16** <sup>14</sup> Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. <sup>15</sup> You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before me empty-handed. <sup>16</sup> You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

**Exodus 7:15-16** <sup>15</sup> Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. <sup>16</sup> Say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened.'

**1 Samuel 1:1-3** <sup>1</sup> There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite<sup>1</sup> from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. <sup>2</sup> He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. <sup>3</sup> Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD.

**1 Samuel 21:5-6** <sup>5</sup> David answered the priest, "Indeed women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?" <sup>6</sup> So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

**2 Kings 17:35-36** <sup>35</sup> The LORD had made a covenant with them and commanded them, "You shall not worship other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them, <sup>36</sup> but you shall worship the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice.

**Matthew 4:8-11** <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

**John 4:21-24** <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true

worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

**John 16:1-3** <sup>1</sup> "I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me.

**Acts 17:23** <sup>23</sup> For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

**Acts 24:14-15** <sup>14</sup> But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets. <sup>15</sup> I have a hope in God -- a hope that they themselves also accept -- that there will be a resurrection of both <sup>1</sup> the righteous and the unrighteous.

**Romans 10:14-17** <sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" <sup>16</sup> But not all have obeyed the good news;<sup>1</sup> for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for<sup>1</sup> you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Ephesians 5:18-20** but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**1 Timothy 4:6** If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters,<sup>1</sup> you will be a good servant<sup>2</sup> of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.