

*A few years ago my nephews got a "Twister" game for Christmas. My way of playing the game is to say, "I'll spin; you twist." The fun wore off quickly, and the boys were ready to move on to something else. Wanting to be a good responsible aunt, I insisted that they put the game away first. Being ornery boys, they didn't. My niece, however, who was about two years old, was watching carefully. She walked over to that big plastic sheet, and tried with her tiny little arms to gather it up. Of course it was too big for her, but it seemed that she only wanted to please me. And I loved her so much at that moment.*

*When we attempt to worship God, whose vastness and superiority are incomprehensible, He knows that the task is too big for us. But much of worship concerns wanting to please Him, and I believe He loves us when we try.*



## CHAPTER ONE

# GOD, THE CREATOR

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*  
**Genesis 1:1**

. . . This first chapter of Genesis breathes worship. . . Its central concern is not to explain the how of creation, but to catch the reader up with the wonder of creation. This is not to exalt the creation itself, but is an invitation to worship the Creator. . . The Bible never speaks of the doctrine of creation purely out of intellectual curiosity. Creation is used to encourage worship, to increase faith, and to change perspective on our life in the light of the nature of God. (Wilkinson, 29-30)

### WORSHIP BEGINS WITH CREATION

**T**he story of worship begins with creation. Imagine the lives of Adam and Eve before the Fall. They were constantly in the presence of God, who made the world and everything in it. He produced life out of nothing, light out of darkness, beauty out of formlessness. D.A. Carson deduces, "There was no need to exhort human beings in worship; their entire existence revolved around the God who had made them" (34). The first human response must have been pure, unadulterated worship.

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## An Old Testament Perspective

Edward Young acknowledges, "Whenever man in seriousness contemplates the heavens he is met with God's handiwork, for the marvelous bodies of heaven point him to the Creator" (61).

<sup>25</sup>*"To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.*

<sup>26</sup>*Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one,  
and calls them each by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.*

<sup>27</sup>*Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and complain, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?*

<sup>28</sup>*Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

(Isa 40:25-28)

In the above passage and elsewhere in Scripture, God, the Creator, stands against all other gods. The ancient world was full of religions that promoted the worship of all manner of deities, which were often related to nature. The spiritual leaders of Israel, therefore, were routinely contending with the allure of worshiping idols. Jeremiah, for example, deals with the issue of false

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gods by contrasting them with a portrait of the *only* God capable of creation:

<sup>11</sup>“Tell them this: ‘These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’”

<sup>12</sup>But God made the earth by his power;  
he founded the world by his wisdom  
and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

<sup>13</sup>When He thunders, the waters in the heavens roar;  
he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth.

He sends lightning with the rain  
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

<sup>14</sup>Everyone is senseless and without knowledge;  
every goldsmith is shamed by his idols.

His images are a fraud;  
they have no breath in them.

<sup>15</sup>They are worthless, the objects of mockery;  
when their judgment comes, they will perish.

<sup>16</sup>He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these,  
for he is the Maker of all things,  
including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance—  
the LORD Almighty is his name. (*Jer 10:11-16*)

Acceptance of this one and only Creator requires worship. Walter Brueggemann notes that “Israel has the option to be in relationship with and loyal to the God who can give new life. This God must be trusted and served and is never at the disposal of Israel” (*Jeremiah, 105*). Of course, the children of Israel often forgot this relationship, worshiping according to their own desires. In fact, the following chapters of Jeremiah deal with the repercussions of the broken covenant.<sup>1</sup>

After the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah led them in both physical (the rebuilding of the city) and spiritual reform. Following an emotional and joyous reading of God’s Word, and several hours of confession, the gathered Israelites recognized the sovereignty of God as manifested in His creation:

<sup>1</sup>The relationship between covenant and worship will be discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. <sup>6</sup>You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (*Neh 9:5b-6*)<sup>2</sup>

## A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

The acknowledgement of the Creator does not end with the OT.

The Christological focus of the doctrine of creation in the New Testament can also serve as a reminder that creation is centered on Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, and not on the human species. . . . Significant sections of the New Testament develop the Old Testament trajectory of creation traditions and demonstrate a deep continuity with the faith of Israel. (18)

In Romans, Paul makes it clear that it is the Creator who is to be worshiped: *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen (Rom 1:25)*. In Colossians, the apostle gives Jesus Christ the title, “firstborn over all creation,” which gives Him sovereignty over everything:

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (*Col 1:15-17*).

The Colossians passage sets Jesus Christ squarely at the center of worship. Christ is supreme and infinite. He rules now, and deserves our devotion and praise. He makes this world livable because He died, as Isaac Watts eloquently penned, “for man the creature’s sin.”<sup>3</sup>

The Book of Revelation affirms that biblical worship is a

<sup>2</sup>The remainder of this prayer rehearses the deeds of Yahweh, another significant feature of worship which will be discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup>“Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?” Words by Isaac Watts.

response to who God is and what He has done. Carson points to *Revelation 4*, where God is worshiped simply because He is Creator and reigns over us:

**Biblical worship is a response to who God is and what He has done.**

*<sup>9</sup>Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup>“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, **for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.**” (Rev 4:9-11, emphasis added)*

Carson continues: “Worship is the proper response of the creature to the Creator. Worship does not create something new; rather, it is a transparent response to what is, a recognition of our creaturely status before the Creator himself” (28-29). This seemingly simple truth must not be lost in our attempt to “create worship experiences” for our local church bodies. We simply have no power to do so. The power rests in the Creator God, who has given us hearts and minds that we willingly give over to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Marva Dawn suggests that we can learn from the cosmic praise depicted in the marvelous book of Revelation:

When we look carefully at how the heavens respond to God’s reign, we find many hints for how we might worship now in practice for the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises. What can we learn from angels’ worship of God? What do they express in their songs, and how might that teach us about true praise? (*Royal Waste*, 365)

The angels insist upon worship as a response to God, the Creator:

*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” (Rev 14:6-7)*

Apart from acknowledging that God is God and we are not, the perspective of creation should also cause us to consider the diversity with which we respond. Created in His image, we must certainly expect to worship Him with all of the creativity we can muster. David Wilkinson exhorts,

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“Alongside the image of law-giver, king and logician, the Genesis account gives us the picture of God as the great artist. Here is creativity and diversity in abundance”(27).

Worship gatherings have always contained elements of artistic expression which allow the created to connect in a small way with the vastness and beauty of the Creator. The expressions vary, but all have been derived from the Spirit-empowered imaginations of God’s people. Nevertheless, organized religion has struggled for centuries with the seeming dichotomy between art and idolatry, especially pointing to the second commandment: “*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below*” (Ex 20:4). But it is *idolatry* that is prohibited, not the artistic process. The building of the tabernacle, which was supervised by God, testifies to the appropriate use of creativity in worship, as does the later, more extravagant temple. Both verify that God has no argument with aesthetic beauty designed to bring Him glory.

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## **RESPONSE: PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING**

### **OLD TESTAMENT VOCABULARY**

An overview of worship vocabulary in the OT reveals multifaceted expressions that portray a response to the Creator.

For example, *shachah*, “the Hebrew word usually translated ‘worship’ in English means, literally, to bow down” (R. Leonard, “Vocabulary,” 3).<sup>4</sup> Ralph Martin explains that the word “emphasizes the way in which an Israelite fittingly thought of his approach to the holy presence of God. He bows himself down in lowly reverence and prostration” (*Early*, 11). This is the action considered to be appropriate in the presence of a leader or king.<sup>5</sup> Andrew Hill assigns an attitude of humility to this expression that is “prompted by the recognition of one’s rank or standing in the order of God’s creation” (7).

Acknowledging God verbally is seen in Scripture as being a significant part of a believer’s worshiping life. A common word, *halal*, is found over 40 times in the Psalms alone.<sup>6</sup> This rich word means “to praise, commend, or be boastful.” Also meaning “praise” were *tehillah* (*Pss* 22:3,25; 33:1; 34:1), *yadah*, which generally means to confess the name of God, or give thanks (*Gen* 29:35; *1Kgs* 8:33; *1Chr* 16:4,7,8,34,35; *Pss* 9:1; 32:5; 35:18), and *todah*, a noun generally translated “thanksgiving” (*Pss* 69:30; 95:2; 100:4; *Neh* 12:27; *Jer* 17:26). Also of note are *shabah*, “to laud, commend, or congratulate” (*Pss* 63:3; 106:47), *yarum*, “to exalt” (*Pss* 18:46; 34:3), and *gadal*, “to magnify” (*Ps* 34:3; *1Chr* 17:24).

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Musical offerings occur with regularity in the praise of Yahweh as well. The word, *ranan* (*1Chr* 16:33; *Pss* 33:1; 51:14; 67:4; 81:1; *Isa* 44:23; *Jer* 31:7), is translated as “sing,” “rejoice” or “give a ringing cry.” *Psalm* 101:1, “I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will

<sup>4</sup>For a comprehensive and concise treatment of OT vocabulary, this source is recommended.

<sup>5</sup>*Gen* 27:29: “May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.” *1Sa* 25:23: “When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.” *2Sa* 14:33: “Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king.”

<sup>6</sup>See *Pss* 18:3; 22:22; 44:8; 56:10; 96:4; 104:35; 113:1, etc. The Chronicles also abound with this word: *1Chr* 16:4,10,25,36; 23:5,30, for example.

sing praise," yields two Hebrew words for singing, *shiyr*<sup>7</sup> and *zamar*.<sup>8</sup> The latter sees musical instruments being used in biblical worship. Jubal is recognized as "the father of all who play the harp and flute" (*Gen 4:21*). Most references to instruments are found during and following the time of David. These include harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals, sistrums, and trumpets.<sup>9</sup>

Along with verbal praise, response to God as seen in the OT consistently involves posture. For example, *kara'*, meaning "to bend, kneel, bow, bow down, sink down to one's knees, kneel in reverence" (*2Chr 7:3; Isa 45:23*); *barak*, meaning "to bend the knee," but most often translated, "bless," (*Ps 95:6*);<sup>10</sup> *qûm*, to "stand" or "rise up" (*Pss 24:3; 119:62; Isa*

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*49:7*); *'amad*, "stand" (*Neh 8:5; Ps 134:1*); and *nasa'*, "lift up" the hands (*Ps 63:4*), heads (*Ps 24:9*), or souls (*Ps 25:1*), are a few such expressions.

Clearly there was physicality about the celebrations of the OT. Dance (*machowl*), for example, was not uncommon (*Pss 30:11; 149:3; 150:4*). When David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he was leaping and dancing (*2Sa 6:16*).<sup>11</sup> *Psalms 47:1* commands God's followers to clap and shout.<sup>12</sup>

Such physical responses, says David Peterson, were "the culturally accepted way of responding to great ones and benefactors in the ancient world" (63). They were adopted and became "a means of acknowledging the power and grace

<sup>7</sup> See also *Ex 15:1,21; 1Chr 16:9,23; Ps 33:3*.

<sup>8</sup> See also *Jdg 5:3; 2Sa 22:50; Ps 33:2*.

<sup>9</sup> *1Chr 13:8; 15:16; 16:42; 23:5; 2Sa 6:5; Neh 12:36; Pss 33:2; 71:22; 150:3-5; Isa 38:20*. See also the headings of *Pss 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76*.

<sup>10</sup> See also *1Chr 16:36; 29:10; Pss 26:12; 41:13; 103:1,2,20,21,22; Neh 9:5*. It is used with frequency. While it is commonly used in relationship to God's people blessing Him, God may also bless His people (*Ps 67:1,6,7*).

<sup>11</sup> *Pazaz*, "to bound, be agile," and *karar*, "to whirl or dance."

<sup>12</sup> *Taqa'* sometimes translated "to blow" or "give a blast" and *ruwa'* often used in battle; see *1Sa 17:52; 2Chr 13:15*. Sometimes translated "make a joyful noise."

of God" (*ibid.*). But to take these physical responses at face value and insist that we adapt them to our modern-day gatherings would deny their intent, which is genuine reverence and awe in the presence of the Creator. Forcing or manipulating responses of any kind is foreign to worship as seen in Scripture. Instead of doing so, we should present God in the best way we can and get out of the way. Oswald Chambers wrote, "Worship is giving God the best that He has given you" (*Utmost*, January 6).

We see also that God was not pleased with outward expressions alone. This nuance is suggested when God enlists Moses to bring His people out of Egypt, promising

**"Worship is giving  
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"you will worship God on this mountain" (*Ex 3:12*). The word translated "worship" here, *'abad*, means "work" or "service."<sup>13</sup> Putting Yahweh at the center of life, publicly and privately, requires wholehearted devotion which manifests itself in acts of service.

Not all of Israel's praise was boisterous and physical. *Psalms 65:1* states, "Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled." The Hebrew word translated "awaits" is *dûmiyah*, which indicates silence of repose. In the midst of *Psalms 46*, a declaration of God's strength and help in troubled times, God himself reminds the worshiper to "be still and know that I am God."<sup>14</sup> The intent of the word here is to "let drop," or "relax." In other words, the stillness of this verse is generated by a deep and abiding trust in God, who promises that He is in control and will protect His children from calamity.

Habakkuk's command for the whole world to be silent<sup>15</sup> is brought about by the presence of God, who is "in His holy

<sup>13</sup> This word is prominent when God demands that the Israelites be released from bondage in Egypt, as we shall see in chapter 2. See also *Num 4:26,37,41; Deu 11:13,16; Josh 24:15; Pss 2:11; 100:2*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ps 46:10*. The Hebrew word is *raphah*.

<sup>15</sup> *Hasah*, "hush, be silent, hold the tongue." See also *Zep 1:7* and *Zec 2:13*.

temple" (*Hab 2:20*). Whether this refers to the temple in Jerusalem or more generically to the heavenly temple, the point is the same. There is reason to cease all activity with reverence and awe in the presence of the Almighty. Unlike the dead gods of Babylon that the prophet rails against (*Hab 2:18-19*), Yahweh is ruler of all, and listens and responds to His people. Worshiping one's own creation is futile.

**THE ENTRANCE PSALMS:  
WHO MAY ENTER THE  
PRESENCE OF GOD?**

*Psalms 15 and 24*, known as the Entrance Psalms, "invite theological reflection on what it means to enter God's reign and to submit to God's sovereign claim upon the life of God's people and the world," maintains J. Clinton McCann (*Book*, 651). When coming before God, concludes Ronald Manahan, "Worshippers ought to sense their separation from God; they are His guests" (69).

<sup>1</sup>*LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?  
Who may live on your holy hill?*  
<sup>2</sup>*He whose walk is blameless  
and who does what is righteous,  
who speaks the truth from his heart  
<sup>3</sup>and has no slander on his tongue,  
who does his neighbor no wrong  
and casts no slur on his fellowman,  
<sup>4</sup>who despises a vile man  
but honors those who fear the LORD,  
who keeps his oath  
even when it hurts,  
<sup>5</sup>who lends his money without usury  
and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things  
will never be shaken. (*Psalm 15*)*

<sup>1</sup>*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it;*  
<sup>2</sup>*for he founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the waters*  
<sup>3</sup>*Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?*

Who may stand in his holy place?  
<sup>4</sup>He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
 who does not lift up his soul to an idol  
 or swear by what is false.  
<sup>5</sup>He will receive blessing from the LORD  
 and vindication from God his Savior.  
<sup>6</sup>Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
 who seek your face, O God of Jacob.  
<sup>7</sup>Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
 be lifted up, you ancient doors,  
 that the King of glory may come in.  
<sup>8</sup>Who is this King of glory?  
 The LORD strong and mighty,  
 the LORD mighty in battle.  
<sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
 lift them up, you ancient doors,  
 that the King of glory may come in.  
<sup>10</sup>Who is he, this King of glory?  
 The LORD Almighty—  
 he is the King of glory. (*Psalms 24*)

Both Psalms are in the form of a question and answer, signifying the conditions for entering the sanctuary of God. This privilege is based on the graciousness of God. Therefore the answers (*Pss 15:2-5b; 24:4-6*) “should not be understood as requirements; rather, they portray the character of persons whose lives have been shaped in conformity with God’s character” (*McCann, Book, 733*). McCann points out that the descriptions used here are used elsewhere to describe God (*Ps 18:30*—blameless; *Ps 11:7*—righteous; *Ex 34:6*—faithful) (*ibid.*). God’s people reflect His holiness. In both passages it is obvious that these inward traits necessary for the worshiper to enter God’s presence are manifested in outward actions.

At times, churches have tried to make entrance into the presence of God easily accessible. There is much talk from those in leadership about the worship leader “bringing us into the presence of God.” This task is specifically tied to music in many instances.

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The Psalmist reminds us that “entering His presence is no casual matter” (*ibid.*, 69). The heart of the worshiper is far more important than the choice of the music.

### **A PLACE TO RESPOND**

As we have seen, OT worshipers responded to God, the Creator, in multifaceted ways, awed by a God who not only created but intervened. Until the time of the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites worshiped most frequently in family groups.<sup>16</sup> But as congregational worship began to develop, God issued this decree: “*Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you*” (**Ex 25:8-9**).

Andrew Hill says, “Through sign, symbol, color, and liturgy the tabernacle served to instruct the Hebrews in God’s holiness, transcendence, immanence, wrath and mercy, justice and grace, and covenant love and faithfulness” (173). This dwelling place of God provides us with the richness of symbolism and ritual. When the temple later replaced the tabernacle, it continued to remind the Israelites of God’s presence among them. These sacred spaces give us insight into God’s creativity embodied in earthly form and substance.

### **The Tabernacle**

God gave Moses instructions for the building of the tabernacle, which was to become the center of Israel’s worship. Nearly one third of Exodus is concerned with bringing these instructions to fruition, suggesting that, “at least from the narrator’s perspective, Israel’s experience at Sinai can in no way be regarded as complete without the plans for the tabernacle” (**Balentine, 136**).

#### **A Place for God to Dwell**

God wanted a place to dwell among His people (**Ex 25:8**).

J. Carl Laney maintains, “This command made possible God’s promise to restore Himself to His people. Since Eden, humanity had wandered the world apart from the divine presence. Then at Mount Sinai, God returned His presence and reestablished the long lost relationship of a Creator-King to His subjects. The building of a sanctuary as a place for His holy presence would enshrine His purpose to make His people a kingdom of priests” (9). For the Israelites the tabernacle “constitutes a change in the way God is present among them—ongoing rather than occasional; close, not distant; on-the-move, not fixed” (Birch, 129). Remarking that God’s presence in Israel is kingly, William Dumbrell suggests that the presence of the tabernacle is a reminder of Israel’s appropriate response to her King, stating that “worship is the protocol by which one may enter the divine presence” (42).

It is important to note that the tabernacle was built in accordance with God’s plans. He gave specific details that were to be followed to the letter. Just as God is the one who calls us to worship, He also determines how it should be done.

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### Sacred Space

The building of the tabernacle indicates that there can be space that has spiritual significance. The key to using space appropriately is to acknowledge the way in which it reflects God the Creator and His redemptive purposes. Putting a name on a building does not make a space sacred, nor does the use of particular objects or furniture. Space is sacred when it is given over to God’s use, reflects His creativity, communicates with meaningful symbols, and is filled with His presence by virtue of the presence of His people.

The tabernacle housed God’s presence; it was not a place that accommodated large gatherings. Worshipers brought their gifts there, which were offered by the priests. The taber-

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nacle was symbolically arranged: the Israelites, for the most part, resided in the outer circle, the courtyard was for a higher level of persons, and the Holy Place was

limited to a certain number of priests. The Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant rested, could be accessed only by the High Priest, and only after purification rituals.

The furniture, also built according to God's design, was infused with meaning as well. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the divine presence. It contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod. The altar of incense represented prayers; the table of showbread, eaten by priests only, showed that God desired to commune with His people; the lampstand provided light which symbolized God as the only source of light; the bronze laver, where the priests washed before sacrificial offerings was representative of the need for preparation and purification before entering the presence of God.<sup>17</sup>

### Transcendence and Immanence

God is "self-existent and self-sufficient" or transcendent. In the OT, this characteristic was often illustrated by direct encounters with Him, known as theophanies. Moses' experience at the burning bush (*Ex 3:2*), his meeting with God at the foot of Mt. Sinai (*Ex 19:16-20*), and the glory that filled the tabernacle (*Ex 40:34-36*) are well-known examples. These face-to-face experiences illustrate that God is "holy other": "Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground." "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish." "Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it." The presence of God Almighty discloses the insignificance of mere men.

<sup>17</sup>For a concise description and explanation of the tabernacle furnishings, see Hill, 166-170.

Yet God is also characterized by immanence, His “all-per-vading presence and power within His creation.” Unlike the pagan gods worshiped by the ancients, the God of Israel was, from the very beginning, involved with His creation: “*Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?*” (*Ps 113:5-6*).

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson recognize the “challenge of articulating the Christian understanding of the nature of God in a manner that balances, affirms and holds in creative tension the twin truths of the divine transcendence and the divine immanence” (11). In his thoughts concerning Exodus, Gerald Janzen discusses the correlation between these two truths. “If,” he says, “the laws of *20:22–23:33* are associated with the majesty of God that inspires great fear and a sense of God’s distance, the instructions for the sanctuary in *chapters 25–31* are associated with the sense of the communing nearness of God in *24:9-11*” (185). Similarly, the tabernacle itself stood as a testimony to the character of a God so great as to be feared, yet within its walls lay the means by which “Israel was enabled to approach the Holy One and to live in His presence” (Peterson, 32).

Evangelical gatherings today lean, for the most part, toward immanence, rather than transcendence. Barry Liesch appeals for balance between the two, acknowledging that “given the loss of a sense of transcendence in our culture generally, we will have to work harder to make sure it is present in our worship” (27).

### A Motif of Offering

At the heart of the plans for the tabernacle is a motif of offering. First, the establishment of a place for God to dwell among His people is “not a human device, but a holy gift that comes from God’s own awesome intentionality” (Brueggemann,

**The establishment of a place for God to dwell among His people is no mere human device.**

“Exodus,” 882). Second, the building of the tabernacle provided opportunity for the grateful Israelites to give of themselves in honor of Yahweh (Ex 25:1-2). “The call for material,” says Stephen Binz, “is prefaced by the instruction that all contributions are to be made freely—not compelled—as each one’s heart is prompted to give” (98). So willing were they, God had to call a halt to their offerings “because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work” (Ex 36:7). Finally, the sacrificial system constituted the procedures of worship practiced within the tabernacle, including ritual washings, burnt offerings, prayers of confession or praise, silent meditation or singing of liturgical responses, blessings or benedictions, and a fellowship meal (see Hill, 142). Each of these features carries an inference of giving. Implications for Sunday morning worship are evident in this propensity toward offering. Worship is a gift that God gives His children; we need to have a means of responding to Him. Conversely, God desires our worship, which we give willingly, abundantly, and with excellence. In His choice of worship practices God allows for the giftedness and creativity of His people to be used for His glory.

### A Feast for the Senses

*“Moses said to the whole Israelite community, “This is what the LORD has commanded: <sup>5</sup>From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; <sup>6</sup>blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; <sup>7</sup>ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; <sup>8</sup>olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; <sup>9</sup>and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.” (Ex 35:4-9)*

Janzen writes, “The mere listing of the materials for the tabernacle—rich and varied in colors, textures, and aromas—already stimulates the imagination to anticipate the sanctuary as a feast for the senses” (194). He continues, “The tabernacle becomes a place where worship arises to God not

just from the human heart and the human spirit but also from the human body as engaged through its various senses and the emotions connected to them” (*ibid.*). Here we encounter the use of the whole self in worship, as we have already seen illustrated in the Psalms.

Artistry is abundantly evident in the design of the tabernacle, and later, the temple. Because artistic expression was part of the ancient world in every culture, the Israelites had no trouble providing the necessary skills to craft the beautiful furnishings and accoutrements required for the completion of these structures.<sup>18</sup> These artistic gifts were inspired by the Spirit of God:

*<sup>30</sup>Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, <sup>31</sup>and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—<sup>32</sup>to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, <sup>33</sup>to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship. (Ex 35:30-33)*

Certainly the Israelites understood that their contributions were honoring to the Lord, and did not see these offerings as an end in themselves, but as offerings to God, the Creator.

The transition from the tabernacle to the temple marks a significant era in the worship of Israel, under the leadership of King David. It is this period that gives rise to an organized musical community, designated worship responsibilities for the priesthood, and eventually, a permanent worship structure.

### **An Organized Worshipping Community**

The capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines (*1Sa 4:1-11*) represented not only a significant defeat in battle, but dealt a blow to the worship of Israel as well. The symbol of the divine presence of God was now in the hands of the enemy. Of course, after seven months of plagues, the

<sup>18</sup>See Hill, 214, for a list of arts, skills, and crafts used by the Israelites.

Philistines were ready to return it. It was sent to Beth Shemesh, where seventy men were struck dead for looking at it. The ark then found a resting place for twenty years at Kiriath Jearim until David transferred it to Jerusalem, but not without the expense of the life of Uzzah, who touched it when it was in danger of falling (*2Sa 6:1-11* and *1Chr 13:1-13*).

It is not surprising that bringing the ark to Jerusalem was an occasion for worship, including singing, dancing, and sacrifice.<sup>19</sup> David placed the ark in a specifically prepared tent located in Zion, where the worship surrounding its installation included burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (*1Sa 6:17-18*). After these initial rituals, however, worship at David's tent was characterized by praise, including singing, prophesying, and playing musical instruments (*1Chr 16:4; 25:1-31*). It is likely that many of the Psalms were both written and used in the worship surrounding David's tent (J. Leonard, "Tabernacle," 121). The return of the ark to the midst of God's people allowed for the establishment of a center of worship for Israel.

David desired to build a permanent structure to house the ark, but was denied the privilege (*2Sa 7:1-17; 1Chr 28:1-7*). God did, however, entrust David with planning the house that Solomon would build. Again, as in the building of the tabernacle, God gave specific instructions for its construction. "All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan" (*1Chr 28:19*). The organization of worship in the time of David leaves no doubt that God desired to have a say in how He would be worshiped. "All this" (*1Chr 28:19*) included not just the plans for the temple itself, but the plans for worshipping there.

Near the end of his life, after turning the kingship over to Solomon, David gathered the Levites and set them aside to

<sup>19</sup> The response of David's wife, Michal, is notable. She "despised him in her heart" (*2Sa 6:16*). She was punished for this attitude by not being blessed with children.

perform the important ministry of worship leadership. The descendants of the tribe of Levi had been in charge of the tabernacle, setting it up and tearing it down, as well as caring for its furniture, including the Ark of the Covenant (*Num 1:47-54*). They also assisted the priests in acts of worship, such as consecrating the bread, looking after tithes and offerings, and preparing sacrifices. In short, they were trusted with the holy things of worship, which was no small matter. Now that the building of a permanent worship structure was imminent, David divided 38,000 Levites who were over thirty years of age into groups of 24,000 for the work of the temple, 6,000 as officials and judges, 4,000 as gatekeepers, and 4,000 as musicians (*1Chr 23:1-5*).<sup>20</sup>

We have already seen that music played an important part in the worship of the Israelites. It is at this juncture, however, that it becomes organized and mandated. According to 1 Chronicles:

*David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. . . .<sup>6</sup>All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. <sup>7</sup>Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288. (*1Chr 25:1,6-7*)*

**Music played an important part in the worship of the Israelites.**

Hill suggests, “These musical guilds were responsible for composing and directing the songs of praise and thanksgiving used in the temple celebrations and worship services” (40). The musicians stayed in the Temple and were responsible for the work “day and night” (*1Chr 9:33*). The picture of leadership that we see here is the closest biblical example we

<sup>20</sup> Music also is prominent at the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra and Nehemiah.

have to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century definition of worship ministry. In that regard, several observations are of value.

First, the musicians were selected from among the Levites. Their *spiritual* qualifications were more important than their *musical* qualifications. Levites had to be purified and consecrated before performing their various ministries (see *Num 8:6-21*). They had been set apart, and were expected to reflect the holiness of God.

Second, their ministry included prophesying, not just singing and playing instruments, which implies that some sort of divine revelation was inherent in their calling.<sup>21</sup> Richard Leonard suggests that “these musicians led in a spontaneous and overwhelming outpouring of worship” (“**Prophetic**,” 165-166). This responsibility gave the musicians a status above the ordinary Levites, but below the priests, indicating the importance that God placed upon the use of music in worship. Their ministry was one of both praise and exhortation.

Third, both vocal and instrumental music were considered to be valuable for worship. We have noted the obvious presence of instruments in the Psalms, but the worship of the temple solidifies them as useful and appropriate. Harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets were employed for praise when the ark was moved to Jerusalem (*1Chr 13:8*). Apparently instrumental music was not always accompanied by verbal praise: “*Heman and Jeduthun were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cymbals and for the playing of the other instruments for sacred song*” (*1Chr 16:42*). Other times, however, the two joined together in a spirit of unity:

<sup>21</sup> See *1Sa 10:15*: “After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.” Asaph is called a “seer,” one who received divine messages in visions or dreams (*2Chr 29:30*), as was Heman (*1Chr 25:5*). Miriam and Deborah, both prophetesses, composed songs as a means of praising God for victory (*Exodus 15; Jdg 4:4*). Peter quotes David in his Pentecost sermon, calling the singer of Israel a prophet (*Acts 2:25-31*). Prophesying could include speaking for God, involving not only new revelations, but also reminders of old revelations.

<sup>12</sup>All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. <sup>13</sup>The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang:

“He is good;  
his love endures forever.” (2Chr 5:12-13).

Finally, the elaborate worship gatherings required that the musicians of David’s day be trained, skilled, and supervised. Their duties required that they work unselfishly together. **First Chronicles 25:8** states, “Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties.” All of the musicians were qualified, but casting lots ensured that the order in which they served was determined by God. There was no favoritism, but rather an expectation of excellence and partnership for the music used in the service of the Lord. Later, the musicians were placed in charge of the workers who repaired the temple under the leadership of Josiah (2Chr 34:12-13).

## The Temple

When Solomon completed the temple and was able to place the ark there, along with the tabernacle furniture, the occasion was momentous:

<sup>10</sup>When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. <sup>11</sup>And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled His temple. <sup>12</sup>Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; <sup>13</sup>I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever. (1Kgs 8:10-13)

During the reign of Solomon, the temple “took over the visual function of the tabernacle. It was a place where people under the old covenant had the opportunity to develop their relationship with God through sacrifice and prayer. Everything in it served to remind God’s people that sin separates

them from a holy God” (Laney, 37). The temple was larger and more extravagant than the tabernacle, but still reminded the people of God’s presence among them.<sup>22</sup> While the tabernacle was portable, the temple was permanent, indicating “the transition from a wandering people to an established kingdom” (Longman, *Immanuel*, 47-48).

Since kings frequently built temples in honor of their gods, it must have seemed appropriate to the people of Israel to also erect such a structure. Yahweh, however, was in no need of one (see *1Kgs 8:27; Acts 7:48-50*). His divine wisdom though, acknowledged that His people needed a tangible reminder of His faithfulness. Furthermore, a place to offer sacrifices was necessary for covenant keeping, obedience, and loyalty.

### Prayer and Sacrifice

Solomon’s prayer of dedication brings to light an emphasis not prevalent in the worship of the tabernacle, that of a place of prayer:

**A place to offer sacrifices was necessary for covenant keeping, obedience, and loyalty.**

*<sup>28</sup>Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. <sup>29</sup>May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, “My Name shall be there,” so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. <sup>30</sup>Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. (1Kgs 8:28-30)*

Solomon recognizes that even though God’s people may pray toward the temple, He will answer from heaven, where He dwells. This prayer of dedication and the acts that surround also emphasize the importance of sacred space.

<sup>22</sup> See *1 Kings 5-8* for a portrait of the temple.

Under Solomon's reign the temple also became the place for the ritual of sacrifices (*2Chr 7:11-12*), "visible and tangible expressions of the relationship of God's people with himself" (**Webber, *Features*, 129**). The sacrificial system will be discussed in an upcoming chapter.

## Symbolism

Robert Webber emphasizes that the arrangement of the outer court, inner court, and Holy of Holies, as well as the various pieces of furniture "were laden with symbolic meaning as they depicted an encounter with God" (**Webber, *Features*, 129**).<sup>23</sup> This attention to the symbolic had been true of the tabernacle as well. Both model "the use of sign and symbol in artistic expression to convey theological truths" (**Hill, 190**).<sup>24</sup>

For most people today, symbols are mere representations or illustrations of something else. But in the ancient world they were "not merely notions; they were powerful mediators of divine activity" (**Webber, *History*, 79**). In other words, a symbol had the ability to embody the thing that it symbolized; thus, in biblical history the divine presence was made visible through signs and symbols. Ron Owens illustrates:

**In the ancient world a symbol had the ability to embody what it symbolized.**

As we follow the pilgrimage of the children of Israel in the OT, we see God expressing various aspects of His nature and giving different pictures of what He is like. He revealed, or imaged, Himself at the foot of Mount Sinai with the cloud and the fire. He imaged His character in the Ten Commandments. He imaged Himself in the Ark of the Covenant, in which were placed the rod and bread. The seat on top of the ark represented the throne. The ark itself imaged the intimate bond that He had established between Himself and His people, and it

<sup>23</sup> The tabernacle furniture was moved by Solomon into the temple (*1Kgs 8:4*).

<sup>24</sup> For the difference between sign and symbol in the OT see **Hill, 57-58**.

was placed in the Holy of Holies where His *shekinah* glory, His presence, dwelt. . . . The entire Old Testament preimagined the Son. Everything pointed toward Him until, in the fullness of time, He, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt, would be fleshed out among us. God's primary and complete image of Himself was revealed in Jesus Christ. (23)

Other symbols found in the Bible include the rainbow, altars, sanctuaries, the burning bush, cloud by day, fire by night, circumcision, unleavened bread, the Cross, tongues of fire, the Eucharist, baptism, and the Church. William Robinson calls attention to the fact that for the Jew "the Word of God was never primarily a spoken word. It was given in *act* rather than in *phrase*" (217). He continues, "In worship, which was corporate action, rather than words, Christians constantly saw the holy action of God re-presented in symbolic forms" (219).

Barry Liesch states that the "symbolic meanings provide us with insights into many aspects of our own worship" (140). Noting that many churches have tended to value verbal over symbolic, he contends that "it may not be enough to provide people with an intellectual faith and an intellectual worship that centers on verbal expression. . . . The spatial and symbolical may be as crucial as the verbal and analytic" (145).

## THE LAMENTS

Sometimes we may feel confused or even abandoned by our Creator because His ways are not our ways. The Scriptural response to this is lament, which Hill describes as an "expression of honest doubt about God's goodness and an appeal to God's grace and compassion for intervention in a desperate situation" (198). These have been all but abandoned in our current culture. Many planners of Sunday gatherings have faced this dilemma following a tragedy within their particular community. In America, our lack of repertoire became obvious on the Sunday following the attacks of

September 11, 2001. There were no hymns or praise choruses that adequately expressed the grief and confusion felt by most people seated in pews that day.

Scripture, however, does not shy away from the human need to cry, question, and despair. The Psalms in particular provide numerous accounts of such expressions.<sup>25</sup> John Witvliet implores, “When faced with an utter loss of words and an oversupply of volatile emotions, we best rely not on our own stuttering speech but on the reliable and profoundly relevant laments of the Hebrew Scriptures” (42).

**Scripture does not shy away from the human need to cry, question, and despair.**

Take, for example, the desperate cry of David in Psalm 56:

*<sup>1</sup>Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me;  
all day long they press their attack.*

*<sup>2</sup>My slanderers pursue me all day long;  
many are attacking me in their pride.*

*<sup>3</sup>When I am afraid,  
I will trust in you.*

*<sup>4</sup>In God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust; I will not be afraid.  
What can mortal man do to me?*

*<sup>5</sup>All day long they twist my words;  
they are always plotting to harm me.*

*<sup>6</sup>They conspire, they lurk,  
they watch my steps,  
eager to take my life.*

*<sup>7</sup>On no account let them escape;  
in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.*

*<sup>8</sup>Record my lament;  
list my tears on your scroll—  
are they not in your record?*

*<sup>9</sup>Then my enemies will turn back  
when I call for help.  
By this I will know that God is for me.*

<sup>25</sup> According to Tremper Longman III, lament is “the predominant genre of the Psalter, with as many as fifty examples of individual laments and twenty examples of corporate laments” (“Lament,” 203).

<sup>10</sup>In God, whose word I praise,  
in the LORD, whose word I praise—  
<sup>11</sup> in God I trust; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?  
<sup>12</sup>I am under vows to you, O God;  
I will present my thank offerings to you.  
For you have delivered me from death  
and my feet from stumbling,  
that I may walk before God  
in the light of life. (*Ps 56:1-13*)

The Psalms of lament have a distinctive structure that includes an opening address (such as “O God”), a description of the complaint, a plea for God’s response, a profession of trust, and a promise to praise or offer a sacrifice to God (McCann, *Book*, 644-645). Reflecting on *Psalm 56*, McCann notes that it and other such prayers teach us “that human life is always lived under threat, in the midst of opposition, either

**Because God is for us we can say, “I am not afraid.”** | from ourselves or from others or from some external circumstance. The good news, however, is that because God is for us (see v. 9), we can say with the psalmist, ‘I am not afraid’” (McCann, *Book*, 903).

Long ignored in most Christian Churches, the laments offer an alternative to the modern-day insistence upon expressions of worship that highlight only praise. Many enter churches each Sunday afraid, confused, and perhaps in doubt about the ability of God to intervene. Some claim that there is no absolute truth, yet still come seeking answers. The laments give outlet to the fears of the lost and show them that they are not alone.

## NEW TESTAMENT RESPONSE

### NEW TESTAMENT VOCABULARY

The study of worship responses in the NT requires an examination of vocabulary, in particular two Greek words,

*proskuneo* and *latreuo*. These correspond to the Hebrew words that denote bowing down and service, respectively.<sup>26</sup> *Proskuneo* is found over fifty times in the NT, most prominently in the Gospels and Revelation.<sup>27</sup> An appropriate understanding of the word includes action, such as bowing, prostrating, or kissing toward, as well as homage and reverence. Heinrich Greeven points out that in the NT use of *proskuneo* “the object is always something—truly or supposedly—divine.” (763). In the NT it is the presence of the Almighty that invokes worship: “The Son of God was visible to all on earth (the Gospels) and the exalted Lord will again be visible to His own when faith gives way to sight (Revelation)” (765). While the physical aspect is prominent in the NT, *proskuneo* can also “denote the corresponding inward attitude of reverence and humility” (Schönweiss, 876).

It is in the Book of Revelation that we see the most vivid portrayal of worship, often in a form of hymnic expression, confirming that ultimate praise is reserved for the triune God alone, and that it occurs unceasingly in His presence.

**It is in the Book of Revelation that we see the most vivid portrayal of worship.**

*<sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. (Rev 4:5)<sup>28</sup>*

*<sup>8</sup>Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:*

*“Holy, holy, holy*

<sup>26</sup> *Shachah* and *'abad*.

<sup>27</sup> As we shall see in chapter 4, *proskuneo* is used most prolifically by Jesus in **John 4**. Other examples include **Mt 2:2,8,11; Rev 4:8-11; 5:8-10,12-14; 7:10-12; 11:15-18; 12:10ff; 15:3; 16:5-7; 19:1-7**. In **Mt 4:9; Rev 13:4,8,12,15; 16:2; 19:10; 22:8,9** the usage does not refer to the worship of God. Paul uses *proskuneo* only once, in **1Cor 14:25**. The writer of Hebrews quotes the OT, **Heb 1:6; 11:21**.

<sup>28</sup> See **Rev 1:4**; “the seven spirits of God” represent the Holy Spirit. “With God the Father seated on the throne and the Holy Spirit represented by the seven lamps, the stage was then set for the revelation (**chap. 5**) of Christ Himself as the slain Lamb” (Walvoord, 943).

*is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come.” (Rev 4: 8)*

*The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell  
down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne.  
And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” (Rev 19:4)*

In the NT acceptable worship involves application to one’s lifestyle as is evidenced by the Greek word, *latreuo*. The basic meaning is “to work or serve for reward.” A few of its occurrences are translated “worship,”<sup>29</sup> while the remainder are rendered “serve.” It sometimes refers to serving the Lord through the devout and upright life (*Rom 1:9; 12:1*), but can also refer more specifically to worshiping in a corporate sense. Lynn Hieronymus says that the “essence of this word [*latreuo*] is in its reference to the acts or duties that one performs in the overall role of worship, for example, the act in the ancient day of offering sacrifice or burning incense” (44-45).

#### NEW TESTAMENT ATTITUDES

For those who had gained new life in Christ, the attitude of constant thanksgiving became a hallmark of worship. In *Romans 1:21*, Paul has harsh words for those who did not

**For those who had new  
life in Christ, constant  
thanksgiving became a  
hallmark of worship.**

honor God in this way: “*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*”

In other Epistles, Paul repeatedly commends thanksgiving to his readers:

*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (1Th 5:18)*

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:17)*

**Hebrews 12:28** offers an example of “acceptable” worship, which also includes an attitude of thankfulness: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” In this passage, “be thankful” is more literally translated “have grace” (*charis*). Paul uses the same terminology in **Colossians 3:16**, “as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude [*charis*] in your hearts to God.” Used in these contexts the word probably refers to being thankful for the benefits that God has provided.

Hand in hand with thanksgiving goes continual rejoicing: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (**Php 4:4**). “Be joyful always” (**1Th 5:16**).

Praise is also an earmark of a Christ follower, just as it was to the Israelites of old. A favorite word of Paul is *epainos*,<sup>30</sup> which indicates commendation or approval, specifically given by God or His authorities. More closely associated with worship is *aineo*, which refers to the joyful praise of God in song or prayer.<sup>31</sup> Note that this praise is given by individuals, groups, and angels, and that it is used only of God (and Jesus, in **Lk 19:37**).

Perhaps the best known word for praise in the NT is *doxa*, from which our word “doxology” is derived, most commonly translated as “glory.”<sup>32</sup> The OT counterpart of *doxa*, is *kabod*, meaning “weight” or “importance.” When applied to God in the OT, there was frequently some kind of physical manifestation of God’s “weight” or “importance.”<sup>33</sup> In the NT, *doxa* is often used to describe “the revelation of the character and the presence of God in the Person and work of Jesus Christ” (**Nixon, 415**). Luke, for example, records the shepherds’ reaction to the physical presence of the glory of God:

<sup>30</sup> **Rom 2:29; 13:3; 1Cor 4:5; 2Cor 8:18; Eph 1:6,12,14; Php 1:11; 4:8.**

<sup>31</sup> **Lk 2:13,20; 19:37; 24:53; Acts 2:47; 3:8,9; Rom 15:11; Rev 19:5.**

<sup>32</sup> **Lk 2:9,14; Jn 1:14; Rom 11:36; 2Cor 3:18; Eph 1:6,12,14,17,18; Php 4:19,20; Col 1:27; Rev 4:9,11; 5:12,13.** In both verb and noun form this word is used over 200 times in the NT.

<sup>33</sup> **Ex 16:10; 40:34; Num 16:19; Ezek 10:4.**

<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (Lk 2:8-9)

Not only is glory a characteristic of God, but we as humans are required to give Him glory, a response exemplified by the angels in the above encounter:

**We as humans  
are required to  
give God glory.**

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” (Lk 2:13-14)

According to Paul, failure to glorify God causes Him to turn sinful men over to their desires:

<sup>21</sup>For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup>They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Rom 1:21-25)

## CONCLUSION

Recognizing God as Creator puts into context our role in the worship story. Fergusson states, “We ourselves are part of a larger history. Our human story is situated within the narrative of creation. Our identity and destiny cannot be understood apart from that of the cosmos” (6).

But often, it seems, we begin our corporate gatherings with ourselves instead of the Creator. What do we want, need, or like? Sometimes, perhaps, we put ourselves in the

role of creator. If we sing or say this or that, create a certain atmosphere, make ourselves comfortable, then surely God will make Himself known. The God who created the heavens and the earth most certainly deserves more than that.

Stephen Charnock, a Puritan minister who lived in the seventeenth century, observed the danger of setting ourselves above God.

To pretend a homage to God, and intend only the advantage of self, is rather to mock Him than to worship Him. When we believe that we ought to be satisfied rather than God be glorified, we set God below ourselves, imagine that He should submit His own honor to our advantage. So we make ourselves more glorious than God, as though we were not made for Him, but He hath a being only for us; this is to have a very low esteem of the majesty of God. (148-149)

**Worship is a human response to a Divine initiative.**

God, the Creator, is seen throughout Scripture as the object of worship. This worship is a human response to a Divine initiative. Whether in the cultic worship of ancient Israel, the face-to-face encounters with God in the Gospels, the lifestyle responses of the early Church, or the cosmic praise around the Throne, our 21<sup>st</sup>-century worship finds words and actions worthy of emulating.

## What Do You Say?

1. Which aspects of OT worship are prevalent in our present day gatherings? Which are absent? Which should be recovered?
2. Are we guilty of making ourselves "more glorious than God"? If so, give examples of how this attitude might be manifested in our gatherings.
3. How might the tabernacle and the temple influence our thinking about sacred space today?
4. Can you think of an instance when lamenting would have been appropriate in your context? How might this have been accomplished? What would it have done for the body of believers?
5. In what ways could we use our creativity to honor the Creator in corporate worship? In personal worship?