
Worship

13 Lesson Adult Bible Study

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For Northside Church of Christ

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WORSHIP

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Objective: to introduce the student to the basic concept of Biblical worship.

Text: Jn. 4:24; Mt. 15:7-9; 22:37-39

Memorize: John 4:24

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever stopped and evaluated your worship? Have you ever asked yourself why you worship as you do? Worship that fails to understand the nature and reasoning behind it can become vain (Mt. 15:7-9).

However, evaluation of something so sacred is quite difficult. A few years ago, I asked a university class to evaluate their worship one Sunday. Several objected stating that evaluation of worship would somehow invalidate worship. Others came back observing that they had never really thought about their worship and were excited once they had.

This study will help us evaluate and understand how and why we worship. It is an introduction to worship that will study several different aspects of worship—what worship is, how it is performed, its history and traditions.

Welcome to worship! It is the most precious and intimate of all relationships. It is the time we spend with our God in communion and fellowship. Don't be afraid to study it, questioned it, and, most of all, engage in it. It is what life is all about!

A DEFINITION OF WORSHIP

Worship is one of those difficult words to define. It is both a noun and a verb—something we go to and something we do. The word “worship” means to show “worthiness, worth-ship.”

How would you define “worship”?

Why is worship so difficult to define?

You will find many different definitions of worship. The following definition is an attempt to include the various aspects and dimensions of worship. **Worship—A person's/people's response of awe towards God because of His creation and recreation.**

- ◆ Worship is by definition grounded in a relationship with God.
- ◆ Created to Creator; Children To Father; Redeemed to Redeemer
- ◆ Worship is an act. Worship is not a spectator's event. Worship involves the worshipper.
- ◆ Worship is performed within the framework of awe. A sense of wonder, mystery, amazement and reverence are necessary for worship to occur (Heb. 12:28).
- ◆ Worship responds to some act of God. Worship must have a reason for occurring. While God is worthy of worship simply because He is God, we worship in response to God's goodness and grace.

Worship for the Christian is based upon the covenant relationship that we have with God. We worship God because of his "recreating" us into the image of Jesus, His Son (Rom. 8:28-30). The wonders of nature can produce within us a sense of awe and wonder (Ps. 19:1ff.); but it is God's grace and loving-kindness that causes us to fall down in worship to him (Mt. 14:25-33).

THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING NATURE OF WORSHIP

Worship involves more than one element of our being. Worship encompasses the (1) spirit, (2) mind, (3) emotions, and (4) body. Because worship flows out of a heart of love, it encompasses the same dimensions as love. ***"One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'"*** (Mt. 22:35-37).

Of the four dimensions of worship, which do the following verses involve?

- ❖ Exodus 4:31
- ❖ Psalm 28:2
- ❖ Psalm 122:1
- ❖ Acts 17:2-3
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 14:15

Worship is complex. It has both general and specific implications. Worship occurs both within the context of assembly and as a part of our everyday lives.

In a general sense, worship is our lives glorifying God. We honor God and, therefore, worship Him when we offer daily service to our fellowman. Please read the following scriptures and note what they say about our daily lives and our worship to God.

- ❖ Rom. 12:1-2
- ❖ Micah 6:6-8
- ❖ Ps. 40:6-8

Worship is also assembly. The church is the “called out” who come together to worship. In Exodus 24, God calls Israel into assembly so that she might worship. The debate over whether worship occurs specifically within an assembly or whether it is a part of our lifestyle fails to note the complex nature of worship. It is both and has implications for both. It is not “either/or,” but rather “both/and.”

THE COVENANT NATURE OF WORSHIP

Worship is our “response” to God’s reaching out to us. Robert Webber has stated “Worship is a VERB!” The epicenter of worship is God acting in a salvation event.

- ❖ Noah’s first act after the flood was that of sacrifice. Salvation by God prompts worship of God.
- ❖ Israelite worship began because of God’s salvation. Ex. 20:1ff.
- ❖ Christian worship reflects God’s salvation through Jesus. Mt. 2:1-2; 28:17

The basis of worship is God’s covenant with His people. The Lord relates to us through a covenant. We find God entering into covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-7), with Israel, (Deut. 29:9-15), and with us (Lk. 22:20). Certain things happen when we enter into God’s presence.

- a. God calls us into assembly. Ex. 24:1; Heb. 10:25
- b. We acknowledge our responsibility in approaching God.
- c. God speaks to us within his assembly. Ex. 24:3; 1 Tim. 4:13
- d. We accept the terms of the covenant. Ex. 24:3

- e. We acknowledge our sinfulness. Ex. 24:5; Mt. 6:12
- f. We enact/renew the covenant during the assembly. Ex. 24:8; Lk. 22:19
- g. We eat and drink in the presence of the Lord. Ex. 24:11; 1 Cor. 11:26

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What determines most individuals' concept of worship?
2. How did the Pharisees worship God in vain in the first century (Mt. 15:7-9)?
How do people worship God in vain today?
3. One's relationship with God sets the stage for his worship of God. What are some of the basis of Christians worship of God (example—He is our “redeemer,” “creator,” etc.)?
4. Of the four aspects of spirit, mind, emotions and body, which is the least involved in our worship to God? Why?
5. Why is it important to see worship within the context of both assembly and lifestyle?
6. When and how does the Christian enter into covenant relationship with God?
7. What part of Christian worship is directly involved in our covenant relationship with God?

WORSHIP

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF WORSHIP

Objective: to examine worship through a study of the Old and New Testament terms used for worship.

Text: Gen. 22:5; Ex. 10:7; Mt. 2:2; Rom. 12:1-2

Memorize: Romans 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Our English word “worship” comes from the two words “worthy” and “ship” and means to express the worthiness of the one to whom homage is due. This concept is found throughout the book of Revelation. Revelation 4:11 states, *“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.”* The same concept is applied to Jesus in Revelation 5:12, *“In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’”* Both God the Father and Jesus the Son are praised as “worthy,” thus they are “worshiped” by those around the throne.

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS REGARDING WORSHIP

Words help us understand the nature, purpose and extent of worship. Several different words are used in the Old and New Testaments for worship. The word “worship” occurs 256 times in the English Bible (NIV): Old Testament—176 times; New Testament—80 times. There are over twenty different Hebrew and Greek words translated in some form as “worship” in the Bible. This study will look at the key terms and their implications for Christian worship today.

Most Biblical words that are translated as “worship” mean “to bow down” “to kiss the feet” and indicated the action of a subject to his master. A second group of words denote one’s act of service to God. These words reflect the response of a life totally dedicated to God. The third group of words describes one’s feeling of awe and respect towards deity. As Solomon summarized man’s purpose—*“Fear God and keep His commandments”* (Eccl. 12:13). The final

group of words expresses man's thanksgiving to God. These expressions of worship are usually translated with words like "thanksgiving" and "praise."

OLD TESTAMENT WORDS FOR WORSHIP

"Shacah" occurs 42 times in the Old Testament and means to "bow down". It is the action of a subject to a master and denotes the position of the worshipper as a lesser individual. Additional forms of this word occur over 120 times in the Old Testament.

Examples:

"Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, saying, 'Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives'" (Gen. 24:26-27).

"All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name" (Ps. 66:4). Additional Examples: Gen. 22:5; Ex. 4:31; Ex. 24:1; Ps. 86:9.

"Abad" is used 240 times in Old Testament and means "to serve" (Ex. 10:7; Deut. 8:19). It describes the life that is fully committed to the Lord.

Examples:

"And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain'" (Ex. 3:1-2).

"If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed" (Deut. 8:19).

Two additional words contribute to our understanding of worship in the Bible. "Yare" means "to respect, to have a sense of awe." It reflects the attitude of the worshiper both in mind and heart (1 Sam. 12:14; Eccl. 12:13; Prov. 3:7). "Yadah" means to give thanks and expresses the gratitude of the worship. It is frequently found in the psalms of praise (Ps. 136:1).

NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR WORSHIP

“Proskuneo” is found 59 times in the New Testament and literally means: “to kiss the feet.” Often, individuals would “worship” Jesus by grasping his feet (Mt. 28:9).

Examples:

“All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only”” (Matt 4:9-10).

“God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). Additional Examples: Mt. 2:2; 8:2; 9:18; 28:17

“Latreuo” means “to serve” and is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament word “Abad.”

Examples:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only”” (Mt. 4:10).

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

Two other words in the New Testament that reflect different aspects of worship is “phobeomai” which means “to fear or respect” (Acts 9:31; 13:16; Rev. 14:7), and “eucharisteo” which means to “give thanks” (Col. 1:3) This last term is the word used to describe the giving of thanks during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:26). Thus, some refer to the Lord’s Supper as the Eucharist.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “To bow down” is a frequent description of worship in the Bible. How does our custom of not bowing down affect our understanding of this aspect of worship?
2. How much does one’s physical posture (example—bowing) effect one’s attitude during worship?

3. Why is the word “worship” and “service” sometimes interchangeable in the Bible in regards to our worship of God?
4. How is a life of service an act of worship to God (Rom. 12:1)?
5. What other English words could be used as a synonym for the word “worship”?
6. The Bible says that we are to worship (show worthiness) to God (Jn. 4:24). Does this include the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Explain.

WORSHIP

THE PATRIARCHS—WORSHIP BEGINS

Objective: to examine worship practices during the age of the Patriarchs.

Text: Gen. 3-4; 28:12-22; Ex. 5:1-3

Memorize: Exodus 3:5

INTRODUCTION

Worship is an underlying theme of much of the early chapters of Genesis. Written for the Israelites as they were becoming a nation, Genesis and Exodus provide the foundation for worship of the Lord God. Themes include the supremacy of the Lord Most High, the rationale for the Sabbath, the beginnings of the tithe, and the development of the sacrificial system.

Genesis also introduces man's need for worship. Since the very beginning of time, man has paid homage to the One greater than himself. Genesis introduces us to that One.

ISRAEL'S INTRODUCTION TO HER GOD

Genesis 1-2 is about the creation of the heavens and earth. While viewed over the past century as the primary proof against evolution, it was originally an "anti-pagan" document. As the Israelites were coming out of Egyptian slavery, the first two chapters of Genesis explained to Israel who her God was, how the world came into existence and the origin of evil.

Having been slaves in a culture that worship the sun, moon, animals and Pharaohs as gods, Genesis refuted such beliefs and explained to Israel the one true God. The sun and moon were not gods to whom homage was due, but "lamps" placed in the sky to provide light (Gen. 1:14-16). Animals like the cat and snake or insects like the beetle were created to serve man, not the other way around (Gen. 1:24-26). The great "sea creatures" were created to play in the seas, not to be worshiped (Gen. 1:21). Even the great Pharaoh was a man created from dust by the Lord God, not a deity to bow before (Gen. 2:7).

Issues of worship continue in Genesis 3-4. In Genesis. 3, the issue of who Adam and Eve will serve reminds us of Satan's temptation of Jesus—to give him all the kingdoms of the earth if he will fall down and worship Satan. Jesus

responded, “*You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.*” Notice in this text (Matt. 4:10) how worship and service are inter-linked.

The first act of worship in the Bible is found in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel’s sacrifice to God. Much of what we would like to know about this story is not answered. How did they know to sacrifice to God? What instructions had God given them in regard to worship? Why was Cain’s sacrifice rejected and Abel’s accepted. Perhaps Cain’s sacrifice was rejected because it was not a blood sacrifice. More likely, Abel’s offering of the firstlings of his flock indicates more a problem with “firsts” versus “seconds.”

Worship continues in Genesis 4:26 as man begins to call upon the name of the Lord. This likely refers to communication through prayer even though similar statements refer to salvation in the N.T. (Acts 2:21; 22:16).

How has evolution effected our understanding of the first chapters of Genesis?

Why was a godly understanding of eternal things important for the Israelites coming out of Egyptian slavery?

THE WORSHIP OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

Later in the Patriarchal period, worship becomes uniquely tied to building an altar and offering sacrifices upon that altar. Noah worshiped God after disembarking from the Ark by building an altar and offering sacrifices to God (Gen. 8:20). Abraham’s biography could be written by tracing his building of altars to the Lord.

In addition to calling upon the Lord’s name and making sacrifices, location becomes an important part of worship. Places of worship were chosen because of an individual’s encounter with God at these places.

Bethel (house of God) is where Jacob encountered God and built an altar (Gen. 28:12-22; Gen. 31:13). Other locations of significance include Gilgal, Shiloh, Mizpah, Gibeon, and Dan.

Three additional concepts coming out of the Patriarchal period are the blessing, the priesthood, and the tithe. In Genesis 14, as Abraham is returning from his defeat of the kings of the east, he is met by Melchizedek, that mystical priest after whose order Jesus becomes a priest (Heb. 6:20). Melchizedek blesses the patriarch and Abraham gives a “tithe” to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18ff). Here, three important concepts of Israelite worship are introduced—the blessing, the priesthood and the tithe (Gen. 28:22).

What does the Bible mean when it says of Noah's sacrifice, "The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma" (Gen. 8:21)?

Do we place any significance on locations today as it regards worship?

MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Patriarchal worship is transformed into Israelite worship with Moses' encounter with God the burning bush (Ex. 3:6). Moses quickly learns that where God is present is "holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). Interestingly, Moses' mission to free Israel is anchored in worship. God's command to Pharaoh is to let the people go and "worship" Him (Ex. 3:18; 5:1, 3; 7:16; 8:1,8,20,27; 9:1, 13; 10:3,7,9,25,26).

In the midst of God's deliverance, we are introduced to Israel's first and primary feast—the Passover (Ex. 12:1ff.; 14). For Christians, the Passover is the setting for the institution of the Lord's Supper. In fact, Jesus is specifically called the Christian's Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). To fully understand the Lord's Supper, the Christian needs a thorough understanding of the Passover Feast.

In addition to the Passover, God introduces the Sabbath Day to Israel (Ex. 20:8-11). Two reasons are given for observing the Sabbath. First, the Sabbath is a day of rest (Ex. 20:11), finding its origin in the creation narrative of Genesis 1. Secondly, for Israel, the Sabbath reminded her of God's salvation (Deut. 5:15).

The exodus also introduces us to praise, the usage of instruments of music and dancing as a form of worship to God (Ex. 15:1ff.). As we studied in lesson one, worship always flows in response to a salvation event—in this instance, God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Why is it important for Christians to understand the background and practice of the Jewish Passover?

Should Christians take a day of rest weekly?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Putting yourself in an Israelite's shoes 3,500 years ago, what views regarding deity would you have as a slave in Egyptian bondage?
2. What can we know about the God we serve based on Genesis 1:1-2?
3. Why was it necessary to teach Israel about the beginnings of sin and how does it relate to God choosing Israel as His people?
4. Why do you believe God rejected Cain's offering in Genesis 4? What evidence can you give to support your opinions?
5. In Genesis 4:26, man began to call upon the name of the Lord. How does man's communication with God today differ from Adam's communication with God?
6. Does Abraham's giving of a tithe to Melchizedek have any implications for Christians' giving today?
7. Is the church building any holier than any other place where Christians meet? Should the fact that the church building was purchased with funds out of the church treasury have any effect on our attitudes towards the facility?

WORSHIP

THE FOUNDATIONS OF ISRAELITE WORSHIP

Objective: to survey the three basic concepts of Israelite worship.

Text: Exodus 25-30

Memorize: Deuteronomy 6:4-5

INTRODUCTION

Israelite worship is both important and difficult to study. It is important because it contains the shadows of Christian worship (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). The examples of Old Testament worship help us understand what God will and will not accept as appropriate worship to Him (Rom. 15:4).

It is difficult because Israel was a “theocracy.” Worship was intimately connected with the life of the nation. The priests and Levites were supported by the national government and moral laws were intertwined with religious laws. Unlike America where there is no state-sponsored religion, Israel as a nation and her worship of the Lord God were inseparable.

Worship during the Mosaic period centers around three areas:

1. Sacred Place—Tabernacle and Temple.
2. Sacred Ministry—High Priest, Priest and Levites.
3. Sacred Ritual—Sacrifices, Tithes, etc.

SACRED PLACES

Israel was summoned by God to Sinai—the Sacred Mountain of the Lord. There God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle—A Tent. Within the Tabernacle the Ark would rest which represented the presence of God (Ex. 40:16ff.).

The Tabernacle consisted of two rooms: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Within the Tabernacle were several pieces of furniture. In the Holy Place were the Lamp Stand, the Table of Shewbread and the Altar of Incense. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant within which were the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron and a bowl of manna.

Outside the Tabernacle was a courtyard where resided the Altar for Burnt Offerings and the Laver used for washing.

The Tabernacle served as the center of Israelite worship until the building of the Temple under King Solomon. While the Temple of Solomon was incredibly elaborate, it's basic structure was the same as that of the Tabernacle.

A sacred place was important because of the pagan centers of worship scattered throughout Canaan. God had envisioned His truths radiating unto all the nations from Mt. Zion. Unfortunately, much of the history of Israel involved her worshiping at high places unauthorized by the Lord.

How do some churches continue to insist on “holy places” for the Christian faith?

What are some of the so-called “holy places” of Christianity?

SACRED MINISTRY

Israelite worship was led by a sacred ministry of individuals who served as mediators between God and the people. This sacred ministry consisted of two groups—the priests and the Levites.

The priesthood was made up of men who were direct descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother. Their responsibilities included the ministry inside the Holy Place—the burning of incense, the maintenance of the lampstand and the presence of bread on the Table of Shewbread. They also assisted in the sacrificing of animals and in various offerings made by the people to the Lord. They would later serve as teachers of God's truths to the people.

From this family, the High Priest was chosen. He was the spiritual leader of Israel who entered the Holy of Holies once a year to make atonement for the people.

The sacred ministry also included the Levites, the tribe from which Aaron's family came. The Levites served as the servants at the Tabernacle and Temple (Num. 1:50-53). Their responsibilities included the collecting of the tithes and the maintenance of the Tabernacle/Temple. The tribe of Levi did not receive any land in Canaan as an inheritance (Deut. 10:8-9). Instead, they were scattered throughout the nation so that they could serve the people as God's mediators.

Is there a priesthood in the church today?

How have some churches perverted the concept of Christian priesthood?

SACRED RITUAL

Israelite worship was immersed in sacred rituals. The following specific sacrificial offerings were provided for in the Mosaic Law:

Burnt Offering. This kind of offering was described as “that which goes up (to God).” It was termed “whole” (Lev. 6:22) because the entire offering was to be burnt upon the altar. It was termed “continual” (Ex. 29:38-42) to teach the nation of Israel that their sinfulness required a complete and continual atonement and consecration. This sacrifice, offered every morning and evening, pointed to Christ's atoning death for sinners (2 Cor. 5:21)

Meal Offering. This offering is translated meat offering in some versions, but since this offering was bloodless and meatless, it is more meaningfully rendered meal or cereal offering. Meal offerings were prepared and presented to God as a meal, symbolically presenting the best fruits of human living to God to be consumed or used as He desired (Heb. 10:5-10). A notable exception to this is that poor people could present meal offerings as sin offerings.

Peace Offering. This sacrificial offering was also called a heave offering and a wave offering. This was a bloody offering presented to God. Part of the offering was eaten by the priest (representing God's acceptance) and part was eaten by the worshiper and his guests (non-officiating priests or Levites and the poor, Deut. 12:18; 16:11). Thus, God hosted the meal, communing with the worshiper and other participants. This sacrifice celebrated covering of sin, forgiveness by God, and the restoration of a right and meaningful relationship with God and with life itself (Judg. 20:26; 21:4).

There were three kinds of peace offerings: (1) thank offerings in response to an unsolicited special divine blessing; (2) votive (vowed) offerings in pursuit of making a request or pledge to God; and (3) freewill offerings spontaneously presented in worship and praise.

Sin Offering. This bloody offering, also known as a guilt offering, was presented for unintentional or intentional sins for which there was no possible restitution (Lev. 4:5-13; 6:24-30). If the offering was not accompanied by repentance, divine forgiveness was withheld (Num. 15:30). Expiation or covering (forgiveness) of sin was represented by the blood smeared on the horns of the altar of incense or burnt offering and poured out at the base of the altar.

The size (value) and sex of the beast offered depended on the rank of the offerer. The higher his post the more responsibility he bore. The penalty for all sin, death, was vicariously inflicted on the sacrificial animal. Guilt for the worshiper's sin was transferred symbolically to the animal through the laying on of the offerer's hands.

Trespass Offering. This was a bloody offering presented for unintentional or intentional sins of a lesser degree and for which the violator could make restitution (Lev. 5:15). The sprinkling of the blood on the sides of the altar rather than on its horns gave further evidence that this offering addressed sins of a lesser degree. Special provisions were made for the poor by allowing less valuable offerings to be substituted in this kind of sacrifice.

The amount of restitution (money paid) was determined by the officiating priest. Restitution declared that the debt incurred was paid. Significantly, Christ was declared a trespass offering in (Isaiah 53:10). He not only bore the sinner's penalty but made restitution, restoring the sinner to right standing with God.

The Sacred Ministry was also responsible for the collecting of the tithes of the people. Numbers 18:21-32 stated that the tithes in Israel would be given to the Levites, because the Levites did not receive a land inheritance like the other tribes of Israel. The Levites, in turn, were to offer a heave offering to the Lord. This would constitute a tithe on their part of the goods that they received. The rest of the goods that the Levites received would provide their living as the reward for their work in the tabernacle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus say about sacred places and worship under the New Covenant (Jn. 4:20-24)?
2. What is the Lord's Temple today (1 Cor. 3:16)?
3. Who serves as the priesthood in the church (1 Pet. 2:9)?
4. Do Christians participate in a sin offering that is present to the Lord?
5. According to Romans 12:1-2, what should the Christian's life be?

WORSHIP

ISRAELITE FESTIVALS AND HOLY DAYS

Objective: to introduce and review the various festivals and holy days observed by the Jews.

Text: Leviticus 23

Memorize: 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

INTRODUCTION

Worship is constantly renewed through the process of “remembering.” Christians observe the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week as a means of renewing our relationship with the Lord.

Israelite worship consisted of several festivals and holy days that reminded her of God’s care and protection. This religious calendar also pointed Israel towards the time when God’s Messiah would set up his kingdom upon the earth.

What effect has Christianity had upon our present calendar?

FESTIVALS OF ISRAEL

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. References to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread include Exodus 12:1-13:16; 23:15; 34:18-20,25; Leviticus 23:4-14; Numbers 28:16-25; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Joshua 4:19-23; 5:10-12; and 2 Chronicles 30:2,3, 13,15.

The Passover was the first of the three great festivals of the Hebrew people. It referred to the sacrifice of a lamb in Egypt when the people of Israel were slaves. The Hebrews smeared the blood of the lamb on their doorposts as a signal to God that He should “pass over” their houses when He destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let His people go.

Passover was observed on the 14th day of the first month, Abib (March – April), with the service beginning in the evening (Lev. 23:6). It was on the evening of this day that Israel left Egypt. Passover commemorated this departure from Egypt in haste. A lamb was eaten in remembrance of the blood used on the doorposts. Unleavened bread was used in the celebration because this showed that the people had no time to put leaven in their bread as they ate their final meal as

slaves in Egypt. Bitter herbs were eaten as a reminder of the bitterness of their slavery and bondage.

Several regulations were given concerning the observance of Passover. Passover was to be observed “in the place which the Lord your God will choose.” This implied the sanctuary of the tabernacle or the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted out of the setting of the Passover meal. Thus, Easter and Passover usually occur the same time of the year.

Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks. Biblical references to the Feast of Weeks include Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12; and 2 Chronicles 8:13. This feast was observed early in the third month on the 50th day after the offering of the barley sheaf at the Feast of Unleavened Bread (May – June). It included a holy assembly with the usual restriction on manual labor.

Numbers 28:26-31 describes the number and nature of offerings and Deuteronomy 16:9-12 describes those who were to be invited to this feast. They include servants, sons and daughters, Levites, the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger. Israelites were to be reminded of their bondage in Egypt on that day.

This feast was also known as the Feast of Harvest. The early Christian believers, who were gathered in Jerusalem for observance of this feast, experienced the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in a miraculous way (Acts 2:1-4).

The Feast of Tabernacles. References to the Feast of Tabernacles in the Bible include Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:33-36; 39-43; Numbers 29:12-32; Deuteronomy 16:13-16; Ezra 3:4; and Zechariah 14:16,18-19.

This festival was observed on the 15th day of the seventh month (Sept. – Oct.) to commemorate the wandering of Israel in the wilderness and to celebrate the fall harvests. Features of the celebration included assemblies on the first and eighth days, and the offering of many animal sacrifices. The Israelites were also commanded to live in booths made of palm and willow trees during the festival to commemorate their period of wilderness wandering when they lived in temporary shelters. This feast is also known as the Feast of Booths.

HOLY DAYS OF ISRAEL

Day of Atonement. The tenth day of the seventh month was set aside as a day of public fasting and humiliation. On this day the nation of Israel sought atonement for its sins (Lev. 23:27; 16:29; Num. 29:7). This day fell in the months equivalent to our August-September, and it was preceded by special Sabbaths (Lev. 23:24). The only fasting period required by the Law (Lev. 16:29; 23:31), the

Day of Atonement was a recognition of man's inability to make any atonement for his sins. It was a solemn, holy day accompanied by elaborate ritual (Lev. 16; Heb. 10:1-10).

The high priest who officiated on this day first sanctified himself by taking a ceremonial bath and putting on white garments (Lev. 16:4). Then he had to make atonement for himself and other priests by sacrificing a bullock (Num. 29:8). God dwelt on the MERCY SEAT in the Temple, but no person could approach it except through the mediation of the high priest, who offered the blood of sacrifice.

After sacrificing a bullock, the high priest chose a goat for a sin-offering and sacrificed it. Then he sprinkled its blood on and about the mercy seat (Lev. 16:12,14,15). Finally the scapegoat bearing the sins of the people was sent into the wilderness (Lev. 16:20-22). This scapegoat symbolized the pardon for sin brought through the sacrifice (Gal. 3:12; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Sabbath. The Sabbath is taught in many places, including Exodus 16:22-30; 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-16; 34:21; 35:2-3; Leviticus 23:3; 26:2; Numbers 15:32-36; 28:9-10; Deuteronomy 5:12-15. The Hebrew word for Sabbath means "to cease or abstain." Two reasons are given for observing the Sabbath: Creation and the Exodus from Egypt.

Exodus 20:8-11 reminded the nation of Israel to remember that God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). This grounded the observance of the Sabbath in the creation of the world. Deuteronomy 5:12-15 reminded Israel to remember its bondage years when there was no rest. This passage fixed the origin of the Sabbath in the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt.

The Israelites were instructed to include the family, the hired servants, the stranger, and even their domestic animals in observance of this holy day. All were commanded to cease from normal labor. This included the command not to gather firewood (Num. 15:32-36) or to light a fire (Ex. 35:2-3). Stoning to death was apparently the penalty for gathering firewood on the Sabbath. Those who violated the Sabbath would be excommunicated from the community or could be put to death (Ex. 31:12-16)

The Sabbath became not only a day of rest but a time of assembling to worship the Lord as well. A specific sacrifice on the Sabbath is required in (Numbers 28:9-10). It included a lamb, a meal offering mixed with oil, and a drink offering. This was to be offered as a burnt offering. In later periods of Hebrew history, prayer and other rituals became the procedure for observing the Sabbath.

The observance of the Sabbath set the Hebrew people apart from their neighbors. Unfortunately, burdensome restrictions and heavy requirements eventually grew up around its observance. The day that was set apart for rest,

renewal, and worship became a day filled with rules of many things that must not be done.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your favorite holiday? Why
2. How did religious festivals and holy days keep God before the people?
3. How did the Day of Atonement point towards Christ?
4. How did John the Baptist describe Jesus and to which festival was he comparing Jesus (Jn. 1:29)?
5. How were the Jewish festivals connected to the death of Jesus?
6. Are Christians today expected to keep the Sabbath?
7. Should Christians today observe a day of rest once a week?

WORSHIP

JEWISH WORSHIP AND THE SYNAGOGUE

Objective: to introduce the student to the basic concept of Biblical worship.

Text: Luke 4:16ff.

Memorize: Luke 4:16

INTRODUCTION

The synagogue continues to be the center of life among non-believing Jews. Wherever large numbers of Jews live throughout the world, synagogues exist. As James, the Lord's brother, said, "***Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath***" (Acts 15:21).

For Christians, the synagogue is important because the church was birthed from its assemblies and much of New Testament worship was foreshadowed in the synagogue.

How many different synagogues are in existence in our city?

THE ORIGIN OF THE SYNAGOGUE

The "synagogue" was a gathering of Jews for worship and study. It is synonymous with "church" or "assembly." The synagogue likely developed as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians. It became the religious, educational and social center of Jewish life.

At the heart of Jewish synagogue worship was the Torah—the law, the first Five Books of Moses. Unlike the worship in the Temple, synagogue worship did NOT have a sacred ritual or ministry. Synagogues were led by a "ruler" who was responsible for its worship and maintenance (Mk. 5:35; Lk. 8:41).

What was a frequent problem of Israelite worship in the Old Testament (2 Kings 22:8)?

How did the development of the synagogue help preserve Israelite culture?

ELEMENTS OF SYNAGOGUE WORSHIP

The “Shema” was the heart of synagogue worship. Found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the “Shema” is the creed of ancient Judaism. **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”**

It reminded the Jew that:

- (1) They are Israel, the people of God.
- (2) Yahweh—the Lord—is their God and He is the only ONE God.
- (3) Their response to God is to love him with their entire being—heart, soul & strength.

Prayer was another important part of synagogue worship. The Jews institutionalized their prayers and specific prayers were said on a regular basis. Synagogue worship involved three sets of prayers.

- (1) The first set of prayers praised God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- (2) The second set of prayers petitioned God for such things as wisdom, forgiveness, restoration of Israel, good health, etc.
- (3) The third set of prayers concluded the service with personal thanksgiving and a plea for PEACE.

The third part of synagogue worship was the reading of the Torah followed by a sermon. The Torah was read followed by a reading from the prophets, often reflecting the same theme as the reading from the Torah.

Bible readings in the synagogue came from “scrolls” which were kept in an “ARK” in a special room at the front of the synagogue. After the reading of the scripture, the person would sit down and deliver a sermon, explaining the meaning of the text. The seat in the front of the assembly was called “Moses’ seat.” **“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach”** (Mt. 23:2-3).

What values were taught by the scriptures being kept in a special “Ark” in a special room of the synagogue?

Jewish men stood to read God’s Word and sat down to expound it. Is there any significance to these actions?

JESUS AND SYNAGOGUE WORSHIP

The New Testament is clear that Jesus attended synagogue on a regular basis (Lk. 4:16). Jesus participated in a synagogue worship service at Nazareth in Luke 4:14ff. After reading from the prophet Isaiah, he sat down and delivered a sermon about the Jewish rejection of his ministry. As a result of his sermon, the people of Nazareth tried to kill Jesus.

Later, Jesus encountered strong opposition in the synagogues (Mt. 12:9ff.) However, much of the growth of the early church occurred within the setting of the synagogue. Paul's custom during his missionary journeys was to enter the synagogue first before going to the Gentiles (Acts 17:2).

Worship today has much in common with synagogue worship—an emphasis on the scriptures and prayer. Synagogue worship, however, did NOT have singing in it in the New Testament era.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where in the Old Testament is synagogue worship authorized?
2. How did the synagogue contribute to Israel's survival during the time of the exile?
3. How does the reading of scripture in Christian worship compare to the reading of scripture in the synagogue? What did Paul urge Timothy to do (1 Tim. 4:13)?
4. What did Jesus do in the synagogue to cause the Jewish leaders to oppose him (Mt. 12:10ff.)
5. What was Jesus' attitude regarding the Jewish "Shema" (Mt. 22:37)?

WORSHIP

WORSHIP IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Objective: to explore the preeminence of worship in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Text: Luke 1-2; Mt. 2:1-12; 28:17; Jn. 4:19-24

Memorize: John 4:24

INTRODUCTION

One cannot study the life of Jesus without recognizing the significance of worship both in his life and in his teachings. Jesus' incarnation was immersed in worship. His upbringing revolved around the Temple and the synagogue in Nazareth. His ministry and teachings addressed the issues of contemporary Jewish worship and brought him into bitter conflict with the religious leaders of his day.

In addition to Jesus' teachings about worship, the Gospels lay the groundwork for the Christian's worship of Jesus as God's Son. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' divinity is clearly set forth along with his "worthiness" to receive our praise and adoration. In this lesson, we will be challenged to see worship through the eyes of him to whom our worship is due. The words of John summarize well what Jesus evokes in the hearts and lives of his followers—"***Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!***" (Rev. 5:12).

As you begin this study, what do you remember of Jesus' teachings and involvement in worship during his earthly ministry?

WORSHIP AND THE INCARNATION

From the moment Gabriel announced the coming birth of Jesus to the visit of the Magi, the events surrounding the incarnation were immersed in worship. When the angel Gabriel first appeared, he announces the coming Messiah to Zechariah, a priest who was burning incense within the Holy Place of the Temple. It seems fitting that the first announcement of the

dawning of God's Kingdom should be made within the Temple and in the midst of worship (Lk. 1:5-20).

In the same chapter of Luke, we are introduced to inspired songs, praising the arrival of the Lord's Messiah. Mary praises God as she visits her cousin Elizabeth. Her song recounts the wonderful deeds of God and expresses thanksgiving to Him for remembering Abraham and his descendants (Lk. 1:46-55).

After the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zechariah breaks out in praise to God for the salvation He was bringing to His people Israel. Zechariah's praise was accompanied by prophecies regarding the role of his son in preparing the way for the Lord (Lk. 1:67-79)

How familiar are the songs of Mary and Zechariah (Lk. 1:46-79) to the Lord's church? Why are these expressions of praise so unfamiliar to many Christians?

What is unique about the message of these two songs?

The arrival of Jesus was announced with worship and praise. After his birth in Bethlehem of Judea, angels appeared to shepherds in the field and announced the glad tidings. After the announcement, the shepherds witnessed the angels of heaven breaking out in praise and adoration at the birth of Jesus (Lk. 2:13-14). Having gone to Bethlehem to investigate themselves, the shepherds returned to their fields, "***glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen*** (Lk. 2:20).

Six weeks after Jesus' birth, following Mary's purification, the baby Jesus was taken to the Temple for the first time where he was consecrated to the Lord through sacrifice and worship. While in the Temple, Simeon prayed to the Lord after having seen the Lord's salvation (Lk. 2:28-32).

The most important "worship event" surrounding Jesus' birth was the arrival in Jerusalem of the Magi (wise men) in search of the one born King of the Jews. Matthew 2:2 states, "***Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.***" When the Magi finally found the baby Jesus, they bowed down and worshiped him (Mt. 2:11). They offered gifts to Mary and Joseph of gold, incense and myrrh. Their worship of the Son of God indicated his deity and worthiness to be so honored.

What is the significance of the worship of the angels at Jesus' birth?

What kind of worship habits did Mary and Joseph have based on these texts?

How do you think Mary and Joseph felt watching others worship their newborn?

WORSHIP AND JESUS' MINISTRY

The only recorded event during Jesus' childhood was his trip with his parents to Jerusalem at the age of twelve to keep the Passover. It is significant that this story centers around worship at the Temple. In fact, when Joseph and Mary began their return home, Jesus lingered behind at the Temple for he had to be about his Father's business (Lk. 2:49).

Having been baptized by John, Jesus went out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Among the temptations was one about worship. ***“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”*** (Lk. 4:5-8). Like Jesus, our worship must be directed to the Lord and to Him only.

One word could be used to describe Jesus and first century Jewish worship—revolutionary. Jesus called Judah away from the stale, ritualistic worship of the Sadducees and Pharisees to a fresh, personal worship of the Heavenly Father. Among the revolutionary ideas were new attitudes about the sabbath, prayer, forgiveness and where worship should take place.

What was Jesus' attitude about the Sabbath? (See Mk. 2:23-28)

What were some of Jesus' criticisms about the way people prayed? (See Mt. 6:5-13)

How important to Jesus was forgiveness and worship? (See Mt. 5:23-24)

What was Jesus' views regarding where one should worship? (Jn. 4:19-24)

As with Jesus' birth, Jesus ministry was frequently occasioned with examples of people worshiping the Lord. He is worshiped as a result of healings (Jn. 9:38), of impressive miracles (Mt. 14:33), and prior to his ascension back to heaven (Mt. 28:9, 17).

JESUS' FULFILLMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Jesus redefined Old Testament worship by his very life. The Passover lamb was replaced by the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:29). The Temple was replaced by Jesus' own body (Jn. 2:19ff.). The priesthood of the Levites was replaced by the priesthood of believers with Jesus as our High Priest (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 3:1). The Day of Atonement was replaced by Calvary (Rom. 3:25). The lampstand in the Temple was replaced by Jesus as the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). The table of shewbread was replaced by the real Bread of life (Jn. 6:35). Many other Old Testament images found their fulfillment in the life and ministry of Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the significance of the gifts the Magi gave to Mary and Joseph when they fell down and worshiped the baby Jesus?
2. Why is worship and temptation so intertwined (Mt. 4:9ff.)? How might Satan operate within our worship today?
3. Should the Christian worship Christ as did the apostles (Mt. 28:17)? Why do we tend to view worship only in terms of our Heavenly Father?
4. What other items besides the Godhead do we sometimes "praise" in our singing?

WORSHIP

WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Objective: to examine the practices of early Christian worship.

Text: Acts 2:42; 20:7-12; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:2-34; 12:1-14:40; 16:1-2

Memorize: Acts 2:42

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament does not record an actual worship service of the first century church. Instead, we must piece together the practices of the early church by studying the various references to worship in the New Testament epistles. In most instances, it is easy to ascertain what early Christians did when they came together. However, some references deal with problems unique to specific congregations. Since we cannot always determine the exact nature of the problems the writers are addressing, we cannot nail down with certainty every aspect of first century worship.

What day of the week did the early church meet to worship? (See Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2)

What time of the day did the early Christians meet? Did they measure time by the Jewish or Roman systems?

THE CHRIST-CENTERED NATURE OF WORSHIP

Central to New Testament worship was the church's understanding of the Gospel and its impact on the Christian's life. The Gospel may be defined as "the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:1-4) and it gives definition to everything else in Christianity, especially worship.

Salvation is defined in terms of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3ff., Jn. 3:3-5, Gal. 3:26-27). Through baptism, we are born again of the water and of the Spirit and are added to the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:47). As part of the new birth, the Christian receives the

gift of the Holy Spirit which makes our worship in Spirit and truth possible (Jn. 4:24; Phil. 3:3).

The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17, “***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.***” In worship, the Lord’s Supper focuses on the sacrifice of Jesus (Lk. 22:19). In prayer, Jesus serves as our mediator through whom we approach God (Jn. 14:14). In our songs, he is worthy of our praise and honor (Rev. 5:12). In our preaching, we join with the apostles and prophets of the early church and preach nothing but Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Even our giving is a response to God who gave His one and only Son for us (Jn. 3:16).

It is essential that the “Christ-centered” nature of worship and the Christian life be maintained. We come together on the Lord’s Day—for it is a day devoted to him.

Why is it essential that the church stay focused on Christ? (See Heb. 12:2)

What are some things down through the years that have taken our focus off of Christ?

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCE TO FIRST CENTURY WORSHIP

No book of the New Testament gives us more incites into early Christian worship as does 1 Corinthians. This epistle raises a lot of questions about New Testament worship:

- ❖ The importance of the Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor. 11:17ff.
- ❖ The role of spiritual gifts in the assembly. 1 Cor. 12-14
- ❖ The necessity of order in worship. 1 Cor. 14:40

Paul also addresses the issue of women in worship. It is important that we separate the Biblical principles from the cultural trappings (This process is discussed later in the lesson). Passages relating to women’s roles in the church include:

- ❖ 1 Cor. 11:3-16
- ❖ 1 Cor. 14:33-36
- ❖ 1 Tim. 2:8-15

As we address our interpretation of the text we must ask the questions—What is the basis of Paul’s teaching—culture or eternal principles? Where does Paul anchor his teachings? Would the same “principle” apply today? What are the implications of these teachings for worship assemblies?

In churches of Christ, it has often been said that there are “five acts of worship.” The number five likely arose during the restoration period from an illustration of us having five fingers. The “five steps” in the plan of salvation is a similar example. We teach that a person must (1) hear, (2) believe, (3) repent, (4) confess, and (5) be baptized. However, would anyone deny the necessity of “love” being among this list since the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God (Mt. 22:37)? We must be careful that we do not take common tools of illustration (five fingers) and make them exhaustive of Biblical teaching on certain subjects.

The New Testament identifies the following items as being acts of worship or aspects of worship:

- A. Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor. 11:17ff.; Acts 20:7
- B. Prayer. 1 Tim. 2:8
- C. Singing. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16
- D. Public reading of Scripture. 1 Tim. 4:13
- E. Preaching. 1 Tim. 4:13; Acts 20:7
- F. Fellowship. Acts 2:42
- G. Teaching. 1 Tim. 4:13
- H. Giving. 1 Cor. 16:1ff.; 2 Cor. 8-9

Another issue that is assumed but not discussed in the New Testament is the Sunday vs. Sabbath issue. Texts regarding when the saints met to eat the Lord’s Supper and to give indicate these were upon the first day of the week:

- ❖ Acts 20:7
- ❖ 1 Cor. 16:1-2

The theological reason for worship being on Sunday is the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. The Sabbath was observed because it celebrated “creation.” Sunday is observed because it celebrates our “re-creation.”

Why was the public reading of scripture important in Paul’s day?

How significant has the public reading of scripture been to the church in our day? What could we do to improve our practices? (See Neh. 8:3)

CULTURE VS. ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

We have already indicated the importance in Bible study of distinguishing between eternal principle and cultural practices. The “eternal principle” is what the Lord is wanting us to honor. The “cultural practice” is how that principle is practiced in different cultures. For example, in Romans 16:16 the apostle Paul urged Christians “***Greet one another with a holy kiss.***” This is a direct apostolic command. However, I know of no churches that observe this New Testament practice literally in the way it was practiced in the first century. Instead, we all acknowledge that the practice was cultural; but the principle is eternal.

The principle underlying the command is the importance of Christians “greeting one another.” The first century cultural demonstration was with “a holy kiss.” Today, we obey the principle to “greet one another,” but we do so with the American practice of the “holy handshake” (in some churches, we practice the “holy hug”). This difference between cultural and eternal principles is essential to the proper interpretation of New Testament teachings.

In the realm of worship, the principle\culture issue will effect our understanding and practice of singing, the Lord’s Supper, preaching as well as other aspects of worship.

Issues regarding women’s roles in worship have to be examined in light of these principles. These issues include praying in the assembly, serving communion, preaching, etc. Paul clearly connects some aspects of women’s roles to creation theology, and therefore, to eternal principles (1 Cor. 11:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Other issues affected by “creation theology” are the marriage relationship, the effects of the fall, the laws regarding taking a person’s life, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways would our worship differ with worship in the first century?
2. What problems do we encounter when studying New Testament examples of worship? (See 1 Cor. 11:4ff.)
3. What aspects of worship are specifically spelled out in scripture?
4. Besides the “holy kiss,” what other first century cultural practices have we changed into 21st century manifestations?
5. Besides cultural practices and eternal principles regarding women’s roles in worship, what other items must be considered?

WORSHIP

THE HISTORY OF WORSHIP

Objective: to provide a history of Christian worship as it has been practiced down through the centuries.

Text: 1 Timothy 4:1-3

Memorize: 1 Timothy 3:14-15

INTRODUCTION

Most Christians are unfamiliar with the history of Christian worship. Yet, most of our practices have historical roots. For example, why do we have Sunday school classes? Where did these originate and how do we justify them? A survey of our typical Sunday morning worship would reveal a range of practices that can be traced to their roots in church history.

A comparison of our worship with other religious groups would reveal a wide range of worship traditions. Worship practices range from “free form” to “highly liturgical.” Free form worship means there is very little, if any, structure. Everything is based upon feelings of the individual (most believers in these assemblies would claim the influence of the Holy Spirit). Highly liturgical worship is highly structured with pre-written prayers and sermons and follow ancient traditions.

This brief survey will examine the development and practice of worship since the New Testament times. It is wise to remember that many of these practices will seem alien to Christians today.

What changes in worship have you witnessed in the church during your lifetime?

Why is the study of the history of worship so important?

WORSHIP AFTER THE APOSTOLIC AGE

We know very little about worship after the apostolic period. The secrecy due to persecution kept descriptions of worship to a minimum. Several sources, however, do give us various details of early Christian worship.

Pliny, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, writing around A.D. 111-113, sent a letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan describing Christian worship.

- ❖ They meet on a fixed day before daylight.
- ❖ They responsively sing a hymn to Christ as God.
- ❖ They participated in “holy meals.”

The Didache (Teaching), written around A.D. 100, describes instructions for several acts of worship:

- ❖ Instructions were given for baptism.
- ❖ Both the Agape meal and the Lord’s Supper are discussed. (See Jude 12 regarding the “agape meal.”)
- ❖ Specific prayers are given for reciting during the Lord’s Supper.

Justin Martyr, writing around A.D. 150, describes worship as including the following:

- ❖ They met on Sunday, the Lord’s Day.
- ❖ The memoirs of the Apostles and Prophets were read.
- ❖ Everyone stood and prayers were offered.
- ❖ Bread and wine with water are brought in and, after prayers, are distributed to the members with the deacons taking them to those absent.

During the first three centuries, worship continued to be intimate and focused on the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) and the Word of God. Worship was marked by the following:

- ❖ An increased usage of “Bishops,” “Ministers,” and “Deacons”—professional clergy.
- ❖ The standardization of prayers and expressions.

Constantine's conversion in A.D. 312 marked the beginning of radical changes for the Christian faith and its worship. Church buildings flourished and worship became much more aesthetic and ritualized.

In the East, the Orthodox Church developed extravagant worship ritual that was highly ceremonial, gloriously beautiful and deeply mystical while in the West, Roman Catholic worship developed along a much more simple and pragmatic path.

In the few description of early worship that we possess, what items of worship seem of primary importance?

WORSHIP DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

By the Medieval period, worship was characterized by the "mysterious." Worship was controlled by the clergy, especially the monastic orders. Worship began to emphasize the mystical/superstitious as opposed to the practical. Cathedrals became prominent with each claiming possession of Christian artifacts such as certain bones of the apostles, wood from the cross, the burial cloth of Christ, etc. etc. These items were believed to have miraculous powers that could heal the sick and invoke God's special blessings.

Worship was lost to the masses because of its being carried out in the Latin language (only a few of the clergy were trained in Latin). In fact, the role of scripture almost vanished due to the inability of many of the priest to read and understand Latin. "Mass" (the Catholic version of the Lord's Supper) became the means by which the presence of God was received with salvation being tied directly with the Mass. The doctrine of transubstantiation developed during this period. This is the belief that when the priest blesses the bread and the fruit of the vine, they become the literal body and blood of Jesus.

What happens to worship when a culture loses the ability to read?

When Jesus said in reference to the bread, "This is my body," was he being literal in his comments?

WORSHIP DURING THE REFORMATION

During the Reformation, not only was the “church” reformed, but so was the worship. The reformers made the “Word” primary in their return to pure worship. “Sola Scriptura” (“only scripture”) was a common cry of the Reformation. Essential to this effort was the translation of the Bible into the language of the people.

The reformers also rejected the doctrine of “transubstantiation” and tried to restore the proper view of the Eucharist. Ulrich Zwingli went so far as to reject the Eucharist in favor of the Word alone. His influence led to the rejection of “weekly” communion by those churches of the Calvinist tradition—Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, etc.

Worship among the Protestants varied according to their break with Catholicism:

- ❖ Lutherans and Anglicans kept much of the Catholic heritage.
- ❖ The Anabaptists rejected everything including “public” worship.
- ❖ The main-line Protestants tried to maintain a “middle of the road” approach to worship.

Many of the changes during the Reformation were based on the “reactions” of the leaders of various reform movements. Congregationalists rejected “written prayers.” Quakers rejected “full-time ministers” as the leaders of churches. Wesley, the founder of Methodism, expanded singing beyond the usage of just the “psalms” and “scriptures.” He stimulated the writing of Christian songs and hymns and his brother, John Wesley, wrote many of our songs—“Soldiers of Christ, Arise.”

WORSHIP AND THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

The American Restoration Movement began in the early 1800’s under the leadership of men from various denominations. Barton W. Stone was a Presbyterian preacher who saw unity as being possible only by going back to New Testament Christianity. His followers were called “Christians.”

Alexander Campbell was a Presbyterian preacher who later became a Baptist before joining with Stone’s followers in an attempt to “RESTORE”

the New Testament Church. His followers were called “Disciples of Christ.”

Along with the “restoration” of the church was the restoration of New Testament worship. Struggles first encountered had to do with the separation of culture from principles (Example—Holy Kiss). A second struggle was the “REACTION” against established church traditions. Some leaders rejected the usage of a “pulpit.” Some rejected the paying of preachers because it established a set clergy. Rejection was made of instrumental music because of its lack in the New Testament Church. The weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper was restored after considerable debate.

Several issues presented unique difficulties to the restoration movement:

- ❖ The Holy Kiss
- ❖ Foot Washing
- ❖ Fellowship
- ❖ Bodily demonstrations in worship—kneeling, raising holy hands, etc.
- ❖ Dress—Formal vs. Modest

Most practices in the churches of Christ can be traced to the debates of the 1800’s on what needed to be restored to have “New Testament” worship. However, we continue to see certain practices debated that occasionally arise regarding our worship (multiple song leaders, clapping after baptisms, changes in the Communion service, the usage of drama, the addition of multi-media presentations, etc.).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the change of worship traditions so difficult?
2. Why is a “restoration of NT worship” so difficult?
3. Have churches of Christ fully restored NT worship?
4. How formal should worship be and why?

WORSHIP

THE WORD OF GOD IN WORSHIP

Objective: to examine the place and role of God’s Word in the worship of Christians.

Text: 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Memorize: John 17:17

INTRODUCTION

Central to Christian worship is our communion with God through His Word. At the Lord’s Table we are reminded of who we are and what Christ has done for us. During the sermon we are reminded of who God is and what kind of lives we are to live before Him.

When Christians come together to worship, there should be “a word from God”—a message from God’s Word through which God’s Spirit can do His work. To the young preacher Timothy, Paul wrote, “***Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching***” (1 Tim. 4:13).

How important has the sermon been to Christian worship during your lifetime?

It is legitimate to want to “get something” out of the sermon?

THE ROLE OF THE WORD IN OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP

The role and place of God’s Word in worship finds its roots in Old Testament worship (Deut. 6:6ff., Ps. 119). All major revivals during the Old Testament centered around a renewal of interest in God’s Word:

- ❖ Hezekiah. 2 Kings 18:5-6
- ❖ Josiah. 2 Kings 22, 23:1-2
- ❖ Ezra and Nehemiah. Neh. 8:1ff.

The latter revival, led by Ezra and Nehemiah , was fueled by the reading of God’s Word (Neh. 8:1-8). Several important lessons can be drawn from their example:

1. *It is important to read Scripture aloud in the public assembly.* The Bible says that Ezra read from the Law from daybreak until noon. People need to hear God’s Word.
2. *Respect was shown for the Word of the Lord.* When Ezra opened the book to read, all the people stood in reverence to God’s Word. The Bible will not be heeded until it is respected.
3. *The people were actively involved in listening to God’s Word.* They responded with “amens” and bowed in worship as the Word was read. We need to have our Bibles open and follow along as God’s Word is presented.
4. *Teachers instructed the people further regarding God’s truths.* Sometimes God’s Word needs to be explored in greater depth. That’s why Bible classes are so important. They give the Christian the opportunity to study further and to raise important questions.
5. *The people responded by obeying God’s Word and committing their lives to him.* In the words of James, we need to be doers of the Word as well as hearers.

What advantages do Christians have regarding God’s Word that the Israelites did not have in the Old Testament?

What can we do to show greater respect for the Word of God?

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Word of God was at the heart of synagogue worship (Lk. 4:16ff.). Here, Jewish children learned to read and communities were instructed in the laws of God. Jesus announced his ministry during a sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. When the Gospel began to spread throughout the Roman Empire, it often first took root in the synagogue as the new believers examined the scriptures to see if the claims of Jesus were in fact true (Acts 17:11).

The significance of God’s Word is evident in the way the apostle John identifies Jesus. ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”*** (Jn. 1:1). God’s “living Word” gave way to

God's written word which is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12) and furnishes the Christian with everything he needs for a godly life (2 Tim. 3:16:17).

God continued to speak to His church in the first century through the preaching and reading of the Word. Paul urged Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul's letters were read as scripture to the various churches (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16), and preaching and teaching were practiced during the worship services of the early Christians (Acts 20:7).

What tragic mistake did the Pharisees make regarding the scriptures? (See Jn. 5:39)

How were the Bereans more noble than the Thessalonians? (See Acts 17:11)

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Scripture plays a vital role in communicating God's will to man. In 2 Tim. 3:15-17, several purposes of scriptures are expounded:

- ❖ Wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
- ❖ Teaching
- ❖ Rebuking
- ❖ Correcting
- ❖ Training in righteousness

The proclamation of God's Word is the basis of faith. In Romans 10:17, Paul writes, "***Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.***" The apostle John informs us that salvation comes through that same faith (Jn. 20:31).

The challenge for the preacher and teacher in today's church is to communicate God's Word in a way so as to reach today's world. Preaching will always remain the fundamental means of reaching the lost. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "***For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.***" In addition to preaching, we must explore other means of communicating the Gospel. Some possible means include the following:

- ❖ Public reading
- ❖ Preaching
- ❖ Singing
- ❖ Memorization
- ❖ Drama
- ❖ Video
- ❖ Pamphlets

Having presented the Word of God, the final step is to challenge those who have heard the Word to “respond” to it. God’s Word remains the seed from which faith blossoms (Lk. 8:11).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would God choose the printed page to communicate His truths?
2. In what way is the Word of God “alive”?
3. What has replaced the preaching of God’s Word in many worship services of today’s churches?
4. How can Christians prepare themselves to hear God’s Word during worship?
5. What did Paul mean when he talked about preaching the entire will of God? (See Acts 20:27)

WORSHIP

“DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME”

Objective: to examine the heart of Christian worship—the Lord’s Supper.

Text: Mt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

Memorize: Luke 22:19

INTRODUCTION

At the very heart of Christian worship is the one act that Jesus expressly said, “*Do this in remembrance of me*” (Lk. 22:19)—**the Lord’s Supper**. No other act of worship receives more attention in the New Testament. No act is more solemn. No fellowship is more precious than that with the body and blood of our savior. Yet, none has been more neglected in many religious traditions.

The significance of the Lord’s Supper is found in its rootage in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a weekly renewal of the covenant Christians enter with Christ through his blood. It reminds us of the past and proclaims the future coming of our Lord. It is the most precious of feasts.

How often do you friends observe communion in their churches?

Why do many Protestant churches not have the Lord’s Supper as a prominent part of their worship to God?

AN EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL TERMS

Several different words are used in the New Testament to describe the eating of the bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine in remembrance of the death of Jesus:

- ❖ Communion. 1 Cor. 10:16 (koinonia)
- ❖ Lord’s Supper. 1 Cor. 11:20
- ❖ Lord’s Table. 1 Cor. 10:21

- ❖ Eucharist. Mt. 26:27 (means “to give thanks”)
- ❖ Breaking Bread. Acts 20:7
- ❖ Memorial. 1 Cor. 11:24-25
- ❖ Mass (Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, etc.) “To send out”

There are four accounts of the Lord’s Supper found in (1) Mt. 26:26ff., (2) Mk. 14:22ff., (3) Lk. 22:19ff., and (4) 1 Cor. 11:17-34. It is the apostle Paul who gives the most extensive account of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10-11. From these four accounts, we are able to reconstruct the last Passover meal of our Lord and his living memorial that he left the church.

What term do you most often use for this sacred meal? Why?

THE HISTORY OF THE SACRED MEAL

The Lord’s Supper originated during the observance of the Jewish Passover, one of several sacred meals in which the Jews participated. The concept of a sacred meal is anchored in the Old Testament’s concept of the covenant. When God invited Moses and the elders of Israel to come before Him at Sinai, the Bible says that “**they saw God, and they ate and drank**” (Ex. 24:11). Later, “eating before the Lord” would become a regular part of Jewish worship. When a Jew sacrificed his offerings to the Lord, he would sit down with his family and eat part of the sacrifice as a fellowship meal with the Lord (1 Sam. 1).

The primary Jewish festival was the Passover which consisted of a meal to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It is out of this sacred meal that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. Like the Jewish Passover, Jesus became our Passover lamb and the means of our deliverance from Satan’s bondage (1 Cor. 5:7).

Why would God use a meal as an act of worship to Him?

Besides eating for nourishment, what other uses do we make of meals?

How important to the Christian is an understanding of the Jewish Passover?

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Like the Jewish Passover, the Lord's Supper is a covenant meal (1 Cor. 11:25). During the institution of the supper, our Lord said, "***This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you***" (Lk. 22:20). During the Lord's Supper, we renew our covenant with God.

For the Christian, the communion is a serious and complex time of fellowship both with Christ and with his body, the church. During the Lord's Supper we look:

- ❖ Backwards. "Do this in remembrance of me."
- ❖ Inward. "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."
- ❖ Outward. "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord."
- ❖ Upward. Recognition of Christ's sacrifice for each of us.
- ❖ Forward. "You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Like most areas of worship, the restoration of the Lord's Supper to its proper place in worship has not been without its areas of difficulty. Questions have been raised regarding the nature of the elements of the Supper:

- (1) Unleavened bread vs. leavened bread.
- (2) Wine vs. unfermented grape juice.
- (3) Wine and water vs. wine only.

Additional questions include "How often should the Lord's Supper be observed?" "Who should break the bread?" "How many cups should be used?" "How should the Lord's Supper be observed?" "Is it appropriate to sing during its observance?" "Is it scriptural to observe the Lord's Supper as a private act of worship?" etc. etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the scriptural basis for observing the Lord's Supper on Sunday?
2. What would be the benefits of using "one cup" for the Lord's Supper?
How would it detract from the observance of the Supper?
3. Is it wrong for a family to observe the Lord's Supper privately during a family devotional? How does the concept of the church body affect your answer?
4. Why is the improper observance of the Lord's Supper a serious issue?
(See 1 Cor. 11:28ff.)
5. How is the Lord's Supper an anniversary of the Christian's new birth?

WORSHIP

PRAYER IN WORSHIP

Objective: to examine the role of prayer in the worship of the church.

Text: Mt. 6:5-15; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1

Memorize: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

INTRODUCTION

For churches of Christ, the act of worship that needs more attention than any other is prayer. While an intensely personal and private matter for the individual, congregational prayers are the heart and soul of our response to God's love and blessings. When the apostle Paul told the Thessalonians to "***pray continually***," their worship services together were surely included in this command.

Since men began to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer (Gen. 4:26), God has sought to hear from His people. More often than not, our failures are due to failure to pray than to any other weakness we may have. God's power and blessings are available to His children, but they often are not forthcoming because they have not been requested. James wrote, "***You do not have, because you do not ask God***" (James 4:2). Christian worship should be immersed in prayer.

PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Prayer is the flip side of God's Word. God communicates to us through scripture. We communicate with God through prayer. Throughout the Old Testament, prayer was essential to the life of Israel. The psalms are full of prayers to God. Prayers fueled the revivals of Moses, Samuel, Josiah and Hezekiah. When Nehemiah revived the Jews after the exile, his commitment was born in the midst of prayer (Neh. 1:4).

The importance of prayer is found in God's promise to Israel found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "***if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***"

How important was prayer in the life of Moses?

The psalms of the OT were often also prayers. What songs do we sing that are also prayers to God?

PRAYER AND NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Jesus taught more on prayer than almost any other subject. Many of his greatest moments are immersed in prayer—his baptism, his temptations, the choosing of the twelve, his time in Gethsemane, his death on the cross. No wonder that Jesus taught his disciples how to pray and its importance for their lives (Mt. 6). One of his final promises was “***If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you***” (Jn. 15:7).

It comes as no surprise that after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples join together in constant prayer (Acts 1:14). This devotion to prayer continued as the church was established and began to grow (Acts 2:42). The apostles were so devoted to prayer that they appointed special servants to wait upon tables so that they could commit themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:1-6).

Paul’s missionary efforts were all launched in prayer (Acts 13:2-3) and his epistles are filled with prayers for his brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians are urged to be faithful to prayer (Rom. 12:12), to pray in the Spirit on all occasions (Eph. 6:18), to devote themselves to prayer (Col. 4:2), and to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). Our worship should be a time when we come before God as a body to make requests for His presence and power and to offer our thanksgiving to Him.

Since God already knows what we are thinking, why does he want us to pray?

According to Paul, for what should we pray and upon whose power are our prayers dependent? (See Eph. 3:20-21)

INGREDIENTS OF FAITHFUL PRAYERS

Prayer is “speaking with God.” Yet, too often our prayers in worship are more consumed with traditional phrases than passionate conversation. God will not listen to warmed-over platitudes or wish lists that are more appropriate for Santa Claus than for the creator of the universe. God is interested in responding to a passionate people who are struggling to carry out His will in this world.

Throughout Scripture, God sets forth the ingredients for faithful prayers on the part of His people. They include the following:

Faith. Our Lord promised, “*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask in prayer*” (Mt. 21:22). James, on the other hand, warns of the consequences of prayers offered in doubt.

Pure Motives. James warns that requests made to satisfy our own lusts will not be honored by God (James 4:1-3). Asking according to God’s will is essential for effective prayer.

Obedience. God is attentive to the prayers of those who are attentive to His Word. Isaiah warned the people in his day of prayers offered from disobedient hearts, “*When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen*” (Isa. 1:15).

Humility. The wise man of old states, “*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (Prov. 3:34). Jesus taught the importance of humility in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk. 18:9-14). God heard the tax collector who humbled himself, but God’s ears were closed to the proud Pharisee.

Through Jesus. For Christians, prayer is offered in the name of Jesus because we come before God’s throne through and by the authority of our Lord (Jn. 14:13). Jesus is our mediator who brings our requests and petitions to His Father in our behalf (1 Tim. 2:5). When we end a prayer “in Jesus’ name,” we are invoking the beloved Son of God in our behalf. May we never take that privilege for granted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can the church make prayer a more meaningful part of the assembly?
2. How do most Christians view the phrase “in Jesus’ name”? Must a prayer end with these words for God to hear it?
3. What effects does our physical posture have upon our prayers?
4. What is the Holy Spirit’s role in the prayers of Christians? (See Rom. 8:26-27)
5. Comparing Paul’s prayers with the prayers of Christians today, what is the primary difference in the content of the prayers?

WORSHIP

SINGING AND THE ISSUE OF MUSIC

Objective: to study the concept of singing and the issue of instrumental music in worship.

Text: 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16

Memorize: Colossians 2:17

INTRODUCTION

The following is a condensed sermon by John Mark Hicks, professor at Harding Graduate School of Religion. It is one of the best presentations of the role of singing in worship and why instrumental music is inappropriate in the congregational setting. The material is quite long, but provides a source of information on this subject.

WHY WE DON'T USE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

When you tell someone that you attend the church of Christ, they may know very little about us. But if they are acquainted with churches of Christ at all, they will probably know at least one thing—we do not use instrumental music in our worship assemblies. Because of this, the churches of Christ tend to stick out like a sore thumb. We break the mold of contemporary Christianity, and because of this, we are often perceived as an aberration with eccentric habits.

It would surely surprise some to learn that this practice is solidly rooted in the historic Christian tradition. *Acappella* music is the original tradition of the church, as we will see, but even the etymology of the word indicates the historic character of this practice. The term *acappella* means "according to the chapel," or music according to ecclesiastical practice, that is, church music which was by ancient custom without instrumental accompaniment. Throughout the history of Christianity, there have always been Christian groups which worshipped acappella. Consequently, far from being odd or out-of-step with Christian beliefs, the churches of Christ have solid rootage in the earliest known Christian traditions. Indeed, they reflect the teaching and practice of congregations in the New Testament.

THE BIBLE AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

While there are a few references to the use of musical instruments in the Old Testament prior to the reign of David (cf. Ex. 15:20-21; 1 Sam. 10:5; and the role of trumpets in assembling the people, Num. 10:2,8-10; 29:2), it is clear that musical instruments, as an established part of the Israel's worship assemblies, were introduced by King David himself. When he moved the ark of the covenant (and, consequently, the tabernacle) to Jerusalem, the people celebrated "with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals" (2 Sam. 6:5; cf. I Chr. 13:8). David told the Levites to appoint from among their priestly tribe those who could sing and play instruments (I Chr. 15:16). The Levites instituted a choir of singers and a musical band (I Chr. 15:17-22, 27-28) for tabernacle worship.

Hezekiah placed Levites in the temple "***with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David,***" Gad and Nathan since "***this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets***" (2 Chr. 29:25).

It is no wonder, then, that the Psalms are filled with references to worshipping God with instrumental music. Psalm 150 is a classic example where God is praised "***in his sanctuary***" (his temple) with the trumpet, lyre, harp, tambourine, strings, flute, and cymbals along with dancing (150:1,3-5). Or, another is Psalm 149 where God's people sing a new song to God in the assembly of the saints so that the people "***praise his name with dancing, and make music to him with tambourine and harp***" (149:1,3).

The use of instrumental music in the temple continued until its final destruction in 70 AD. It was a significant part of the worship for temple assemblies. However, the situation was different in the synagogues. While the sources are difficult to decipher as to time and place, there is an apparent scholarly consensus that if there was music in the synagogue, it was only vocal—*acappella*. It appears, whether by institution or by common practice, instrumental music was so connected with temple worship (including incense and animal sacrifices) that it was explicitly and intentionally excluded from the worship of the synagogue.

When we come to the New Testament texts which describe the worship assemblies of the new covenant, we find references to singing, but we find no reference to the use of instrumental music in the assembly. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14, which is one of the few extended discussions of a new covenant worship assembly (14:23, 26), we find references to singing, praying, praises of thanksgiving, teaching (14:14-17, 26), and the Lord's Supper (11:17ff) but there is no reference to instrumental music in

the assembly. Paul writes, “***I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind***” (1 Cor. 14:15).

These explicit references to singing within New Testament assemblies are confirmed by Paul's call for Christians to praise God with song in two texts, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. In these two texts, the purpose of singing is tied to teaching and admonishing each other while at the same time expressing our gratitude to God. This is consonant with the call of the writer of Hebrews for believers to “***continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise***” with our own lips (Heb. 13:15). It is clear that singing formed part of the worship assembly of the New Testament Church. Given the presence of instruments in the Old Testament and in the first-century temple, the absence of musical instruments in these texts is notable.

The practice of the church in the first four centuries confirms our reading of the New Testament texts. Early Christians did not use instrumental music in their corporate assemblies. Not only do these early authors exalt vocal music as a pure means of worship, they explicitly reject instrumental music. They believed that it was either part of the old covenant, or too tied to immoral pagan assemblies (whether at temples or banquets), or too external to reflect the spiritual dynamic of new covenant worship (all three arguments can be found in Clement of Alexandria in the late second century).

One of the clearest expressions of this attitude comes from a fourth century church historian named Eusebius ([Commentary on Psalms, 91:2-3](#)): “When formerly the people of the circumcision worshipped through symbols and types, it was not unreasonable that they raised hymns to God on psalteries and cithara, and that they did this on the days of the Sabbath ... and it is upon a living psaltery and an animate cithara and in spiritual songs that we render the hymn.. And so more sweetly pleasing to God than any musical instrument would be the symphony of the people of God, by which, in every church of God, with kindred spirit and single disposition, with one mind and unanimity of faith and piety, we raise melody in unison in our psalmody.”

There is no reasonable doubt that for the first eight or nine hundred years after the death of the apostles, the assembled church sang their praises to God without instrumental accompaniment. The historic practice of the church ought to give us pause to wonder why the early church did not use instrumental music. When musical instruments were so available and portable (ancient art reflects small hand-held instruments which were easily

carried unlike modern organs), when they were in such common use in the worship assemblies of Jewish and pagan temples, and when there were, no doubt, many gifted Christians who could play instruments, why did not the early Christians use them? The New Testament is silent about instruments in new covenant assemblies. But why is it silent?

They are not silent about instruments in the same way that the New Testament is silent about television or microphones. Instruments were readily available to early Christians, but television, of course, was not. We recognize that the New Testament is silent about some things because their cultural context was different from ours, e.g., they did not have the technology we now have. But the ancient world had the technology of musical instrumentation, and it was more accessible and affordable than it is today. So, why is the New Testament silent about instruments? It is certainly not because they were not available or that Christians were an impoverished community unable to buy them. Something else motivated the exclusion of musical instruments from the corporate worship of the church.

It is possible that this silence is merely incidental. Silence does not necessarily imply prohibition. After all, Scripture is silent about church buildings, but we build them with money from the church treasury. It may be that instruments were used, but they are not mentioned, just like it may be that some congregation bought a home or building to dedicate to the use of Christian assemblies even though the New Testament is silent about that (Christians certainly did this in the third century). Consequently, it is possible that instruments were used, but since it was unimportant to the writers of the New Testament or they had no occasion to really comment on the practice, they did not mention their use. But then it would be difficult to account for the hostility of the second and third century church toward instruments if the first century church used them. The silence of the New Testament seems more significant than simply an historical coincidence.

Another possible reason for the incidental silence of the New Testament concerning instruments may be the realities of the historical circumstance. In other words, the New Testament is silent because the early church did not use them, but there was no theological reason for their non-use. Rather, they simply followed the example of the Passover meal which did not use instruments, but they were not obligated to follow that example. It may be that they could have followed the temple model and used instruments, but they decided not to follow that course. But is it the case that early Christians sang *acappella* out of habit rather than out of

theological conviction? From where would this habit have derived? The early church did not derive this habit from the temple, synagogue, or pagan cultic worship.

Acappella music marks a decisive break from Jewish and pagan worship traditions. To make the conscious decision to sing without the instrument when the religious culture so pervasively utilized them reflects some rationale for the non-use of the instrument, and this raises the question of why the early church did not use instruments in their worship. It is safe to say that New Testament Christians had a reason for not using the musical instrument. Given this historical reality, why did the early church not worship God with the instrument, especially since the Psalms are filled with references to such worship and they sang Psalms in their worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)?

WHY DID THE NT CHURCH OPPOSE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?

At some point we must move beyond the merely historical argument that the New Testament is silent about something. Given the occasional nature of the New Testament documents, it is not enough to simply say, “the New Testament does not mention it, so therefore, we should not do it.” If this were true, then we could not purchase church buildings, earn interest on treasury money, sell a preacher's home for profit, or offer benevolence to non-members out of the church treasury. Mere silence is not enough. Rather, silence must be combined with some theological rationale that gives weight to the silence.).

The principle is rooted in the typological fulfillment of Old Testament temple worship in Christian worship. Typological interpretation is a legitimate exercise. Paul himself draws upon this method in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 in order to offer a warning about Corinthian idolatry. Colossians 2:16-17 states that the food, drink, festivals and days of the Mosaic order were “*shadows of things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*” This parallels Jesus' statement in John 4:24 that God's people worship according to the Truth, that is, they worship according to the reality (as opposed to type which is the Mosaic law) found in Christ. Further, the book of Hebrews draws heavily upon typological interpretation as it compares the old and new covenants, particularly as it compares the sacrifices of the old covenant and its attendant tabernacle worship with the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:23; cf. 8:5).

Ephesians 5:19 contains a phrase which may reflect a typological understanding of music. Paul links together two verbs which are sometimes found together in the Greek translation of the Psalms. In the Psalms the two verbs "singing" and "making melody" reflect the temple worship of Israel. They allude to the Levitical singers, the choir, and to the Levitical instrumentalists, the players (Ps. 68:25). In Israel, they sang and played on harps to the Lord (Ps. 33:3; 144:9; Ps. 21:13; 27:6; 56:8; 104:33; 105:2; 108:1). Israel made melody to the Lord on harps or lyres in temple worship (Ps. 33:2,3; 98:5; 144:9; 147:7; 149:3). Paul's language stands in explicit contrast with the language of the Psalms. While the Psalms envision a temple service with a Levitical choir and band which offers thanksgiving to God, Paul envisions congregational ("one another") singing which arises out of the playing of the heart rather than the harp. Paul's language appears intentional. In contrast to playing the strings of a harp in the Psalms, Paul calls for the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit by praising God with the strings of their heart. Instead of "*sing and play an instrument to the Lord*" as it appears in the Psalms, Paul writes "*sing and play your heart to the Lord.*"

Early Christians, as well as others like John Calvin, argued that the harp instruments in the Psalms were typological of the heart instrument in new covenant worship. While the temple worship played on the harp and used instrumental voices, Christians play the heart and use living voices. When we remember how integral the musical instruments were to temple worship, along with incense and animal sacrifices, it is most likely that Christians did not use instrumental music because of its association with the temple. Temple worship has been fulfilled in the new covenant. We no longer pray to a holy place like the temple (1 Kings 8:33,35,41,48), but we worship God anywhere through the Spirit. We no longer offer animal sacrifices because Christ is our sacrifice. We no longer offer incense because our prayers are our incense. We no longer play with the harp because our living voices are our praise to God. It may be that early Christians would no more return to instrumental music than they would return to animal sacrifices or offering incense to aide their prayers. All were associated with temple worship.

God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and Truth (John 4:24). In contrast to temple sanctuaries (whether Jewish, Samaritan or pagan), the worship of the new covenant community is rooted in the indwelling Spirit through whom we have access to the Father by Jesus Christ. We are the temple of God. We are living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2).

We offer the sacrifice of praise with our lips. Anything that detracts from this central idea or diverts our attention violates the fundamental principle of Christian worship: we worship God by the Spirit of God who lives in our hearts. Our worship must arise out of our hearts and be offered with our lips as we offer God our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Given the above understanding of Christian worship and the typological character of temple music, instrumental music is fundamentally out of character with the nature of Christian worship, just like holy places (a temple), a priestly tribe, animal sacrifices, election by physical birth, and incense are out of place. Instrumental music has the same kind of typological and redemptive-historical meaning that incense, holy places and animal sacrifices have. Just as we no longer offer incense to help our prayers, and we no longer pray toward a special holy place (like Jerusalem), neither do we any longer worship with mechanical instruments.

This provides the theological rationale for the silence of the New Testament about instrumental music in Christian assemblies. Consequently, it appears that the silence of the New Testament on this point is intentional. As a result, when Paul calls us to sing and play with the heart to the Lord, he excludes singing and playing with the harp. Paul consciously points us to a covenantal shift. The nature of worship in New Testament assemblies is a fulfillment of the old covenant and transcends it. As part of this covenantal shift, the New Testament only authorizes vocal singing in Christian worship assemblies, just as it points to the holy place of our hearts, the sacrifice of Christ and the incense of our verbal prayers. Our worship arises out of our Spirit-filled hearts and is expressed with our own lips as a living sacrifice before God's spiritual altar who is Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the best argument for acappella music in worship?
2. Is there a difference between using instrumental music in worship and listening to it on the radio or at home?
3. Why is the absence of authority for instrumental music so important? How do you handle the argument, “The NT doesn’t say you can’t use it”?
4. How does our entertainment culture affect the desire of many to use instrumental music in worship?