

Worship — Week 3: Worship in the Old Testament

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Review

The Triune nature of God means that God's desire for worship is other-oriented. Human beings are uniquely images of God, and perform a special function in the world. We are the only beings who can truly "worship"!

Key Terms

- Glory – In Hebrew and Greek, conveying the sense of weightiness; importance
- Worship – “worth-ship”; actively acknowledging that the deity is worth of glory
- Holiness – Moral perfection; or, set aside for a special purpose.
- Music – Can be part of worship; different kinds of music contribute in different ways
- Liturgy – An order of service.
 - *Gr leitōs + erga* – Works of public service, ministry to a group
 - Every organized worshipping community has liturgy! Liturgies can be pre-structured or flexible, complex or simple, traditional or innovative. What are the strengths and dangers of each?

Worship in the Old Testament

- Early examples: No music or liturgy presented, but rather food shared with God (see below)!
 - Gen 4:3–5 — Cain and Abel
 - Gen 8:20–22 — Noah and his sons
 - Gen 12; 13; etc — Patriarchs
 - Lev 7:11–18 — the *šelem*, well-being offering. Meat, bread made with flour and oil.
 - The Lord's Supper and Offerings are direct descendants of the *šelem*.
 - Exod 24 A meal shared with God
 - Deut 12:10–12; 14:27–29 Offerings shared by the worshiper, the priest, the Levites, the poor/widow/orphan/foreigner.
- Music incorporated into worship
 - Exod 15; Judg 5 — Songs of Moses and Miriam, and of Deborah. Special occasions of celebration after deliverance.
 - 2 Sam 6 — bringing up the ark; David and others sing and dance.
 - 1 Chr 15–16 version: A more orderly incorporation of the Psalms.
 - 1 Chr 25 — Levites assigned for the temple, to “prophesy with” instruments (composition, performance in worship). Represents a time when the Psalms have been collected into books and were regularly used in some sort of organized way.
 - Psalms 120–134 are called “Songs of Ascents,” sung when going up to Jerusalem to worship
 - Book of Psalms: All different types of prayers that God has given his people to sing to him!
 - Praise psalms/hymns
 - Royal psalms
 - Lament psalms
 - Hopeful psalms of deliverance
 - Etc.
- Prayer was typically aloud and public!
 - First example of someone praying in his/her heart: Hannah, 1 Sam 1—Eli thought she was drunk.
 - Daniel 6:10 After the destruction of the temple, personal prayer became one of the most important ways to connect to God.

- Scripture reading in worship
 - Most people didn't have written scriptures; most people couldn't read. Interesting area of study for me: What was the role of written texts in an oral culture? (See Walton & Sandy)¹
 - Public reading for the purpose of confession: Neh 8:1–3, 8; 9:3; 13:1

Animal Sacrifice: General Points

- Sacrifices were not just for “sin” or even ritual impurity, but also for thanksgiving and celebration
 - Because most of us are far-removed from the slaughter of animals for our meat, we focus on the sadness of the animal being slaughtered. But for most people throughout human history, slaughter was a common act, and as part of a ritual it could be celebratory. It means we're gonna eat some meat!!
- Sacrifices involved “sacrifice,” i.e., giving up something that was mine.
 - There are gradations of animals for the rich and the poor—the sacrifice is proportional and must cost something (cf. 1 Chr 21:22–24, David)
- Sacrifices are participatory: the worshiper, the priest, and the deity all do something together
- The sacrifices for sin were symbolic, not magical, and not eternally propitiatory
 - Ps 50:12-13 “If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls Or drink the blood of male goats?”
 - Isa 1:11
 - Hebrews 10:1–4
- Sacrifices teach of the holiness of God and celebrate His created order
- Danger: “hyper-typers” who see too much Jesus in all the details!
- Schnittjer (*The Torah Story*): The portions of the animal²
 - “The philosophy of life was enacted through the system of worship, from the structure of the sacrifice” (306).
 - The animal is placed legs up in the air, with its head lower than hindquarters, to drain the blood. The legs, underbelly, and reproductive organs are exposed heavenward.
 - First part: The fat surrounding the kidneys, the liver, and the entrails
 - “The fat belongs to YHWH” (Lev 3:16c)
 - The kidneys are the seat of the emotions and the innermost being; cf. Ps 139:13
 - Kidneys divided the rest of the animal into what was “above”—the hind legs, the entrails, the reproductive organs—and what was “below”—the body and head
 - Second part: “below” the kidneys was reserved for the worshiper and his family
 - Third part: “above” the kidneys was reserved to be burned or to be eaten by the priests (in certain sacrifices)
 - Entrails and genitals: “This part of the animal symbolized fertility and life. After it was washed, it was placed on the top of the sacrifice, depicting the Creator’s life-giving power.” (308)

¹ John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013).

² Gary E. Schnittjer, *The Torah Story: An Apprenticeship on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 306–309.