

# Worship — Week 4: Worship in the New Testament and the Early Church

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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"!
- Worship is: free beings (WCF: "reasonable creatures") recognizing the Triune God of Israel for who he really is, and enjoying him.
- Different sorts of animal offerings in Israel: well-being (shared with worshiper), sin OR atonement (priest & YHWH), and whole-burnt (YHWH-only!). Also, grain, wine, incense

## Inheritance of Hellenistic Judaism

Synagogues (Gr. *Syn-ago*, "I gather together"), emphasis on prayer and scripture reading (esp. when sacrifice is not possible/feasible). Allowed Jews to retain Jewish identity and belief when scattered throughout empires (Persian, Greek, Roman). Many early-church practices were modeled after synagogue worship.

## Offerings in the New Testament

- "occasional," for a specific purpose
  - 1 Cor 16:1–4 Paul asked for offering to be collected in advance: Gentile churches giving to help persecuted Jewish believers in Judea
  - Rom 15:22–33 Paul asks for offering from Roman Christians to support him on his mission to Spain
- Regular offerings, "in-kind" and money
  - Acts 4:32–5:11 Gifts administered by apostles
  - Acts 6:1–7 Appointment of deacons
  - 1 Cor 9 Paul expects that he could live off of the offerings of the people
- Purposes
  - To share the Supper together!
  - To support the apostles (or overseers/elders?)
  - To provide for the poor
  - People would process to the altar before the celebration, bringing all sorts of foodstuffs, and other fruits of their labor. "Seven altars" in one text of the early church, for all the offerings on a particular feast day.<sup>1</sup>

## The Lord's Supper

- Combines imagery of Passover *and* the Day of Atonement
  - Passover meal was a *šelem*; confirmed to Israel that they were God's people; "rolled away their shame" (Josh 5)
  - Day of Atonement: Heb 8–10; covering moral transgressions; creating right relationship between God and his people
- Typically involved the church coming together to eat a full meal!
  - 1 Cor 11:17–22 The practice was to eat a whole meal together
  - Jude 12 "love feasts"

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<sup>1</sup> Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy: To the Time of Gregory the Great* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 171–172.

- Other important texts; emphasize the “Passover” aspect of the Lord’s Supper (eating a meal with God)
  - Jesus is New Moses: Luke 22:17–20
  - Jesus is the Passover Lamb: John 6:53–56
- Four-fold process (1 Cor 11:23–27)<sup>2</sup>
  - He took (oblation) – tangible things that we made (or paid for) are set aside for special use (consecrated), and given to God.
  - He gave thanks (eucharist) – we acknowledge that all that we have comes from God; he has met the needs of the entire person: body (bread), soul (salvation), and community.
  - He broke the bread (fraction) – Jesus’s body was broken and given to many. We are all fed from the same loaf, we are all branches on the same vine, we are all part of the same body.
  - He gave (communion) – We receive and participate in God in some mysterious way through this gift of himself that he has given us.

### Discursive Elements

- (Contrasted with “performative.”) Discursive includes: Music, prayer, tongues, prophecy, scripture. Words give meaning to the motions that we perform! Without scripture, prayer, song, prophecy: how would we know what the signs of the Lord’s Supper and the Offerings represent?!
- Throughout the New Testament: understanding of the Jewish Scriptures (OT) is assumed and promoted.
  - Most commonly-used books: Psalms, Isaiah, Deuteronomy
  - Not every local community had a complete copy of the OT (still using scrolls! Expensive), but all of the Apostles taught in continuity with the OT. E.g., 1 Cor 15:3–4
- Eph 5:18–20 Instead of being drunk with wine (communion wine?), fill our hearts with psalms (songs that God has provided), hymns (songs of the established church?), and spiritual songs (given to us by the Spirit?). “To the Lord”
- 1 Cor 14:14–15 Sometimes the people sang spontaneous songs (in tongues), and sometimes previously-composed songs of the church
- Sometimes people prayed and sang in tongues, and sometimes people prophesied. (1 Cor 11; 14)
  - Different views on this topic: Continuationists, vs. cessationist. I think that prophesying was only for the early church, until the NT scriptures were written and collected. Tongues + interpretation = prophecy.
  - However, regardless of your view, the important principle regarding tongues and prophecy is: Human beings hearing, understanding, and acknowledging the God of Israel—that’s what worship is!
    - Acts 2:11
    - 1 Cor 14:19–25

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 105–126.