

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

PS. SHOAIB SHAROON

LECTURE NO 2

WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Central Place of Worship in the Old Covenant

In the Old Testament, worship held a central and exalted place. To be in the presence of the LORD was counted among the greatest of blessings. [Psalm 84:10](#) and [Psalm 27:4](#) reveal the joy and delight which the people of God experienced when they worshipped before Him. The history of Israel declared plainly that when they worshipped the LORD aright, their life and nation prospered; but when they worshipped amiss, all things began to fall into ruin. The LORD Himself cared greatly concerning the manner in which His people approached Him, and therefore He gave unto them clear commandments in His Word regarding worship.

This study considered certain key Hebrew words that we may understand what worship signified for Israel. Each word presented but a part of the picture; yet when all are joined together, a full and rich portrait of Biblical worship appeared.

From these terms arise **five great concepts of worship**:

1. **A Holy Journey** — the movement toward the place which God had chosen.
2. **Holy Places** — sacred locations such as the Tabernacle and the Temple.
3. **Holy Actions** — the deeds performed in the act of worship.
4. **Holy Postures** — the disposition and attitude of the worshipper's heart and mind.
5. **A Holy Purpose** — even the meeting with God.

How This Study Proceeded

Some Hebrew words bear the direct meaning of “worship,” yet many others, though related, contribute to the full experience of worship. Even words such as *to seek* or *the fear of the LORD* help us to understand the nature of worship. These terms, each by itself incomplete, together form a united and comprehensive understanding of worship.

WORSHIP AS A HOLY JOURNEY

The Command to Seek the Chosen Place

Israel was commanded to **seek** (Hebrew: *dārash*) the place which the LORD should choose, there to worship Him ([Deuteronomy 12](#)). This implied movement, travel, and obedience.

Worship could not be performed everywhere or anywhere; it was appointed only unto that place which God Himself had chosen.

Later, in the law concerning the **three annual feasts**, every Israelite male was required to journey unto that holy place ([Deuteronomy 16](#)). Thus worship demanded effort, pilgrimage, and faithfulness.

In contrast, the worship performed at various unauthorized places—such as Jeroboam’s shrines at Dan and Bethel—was sternly condemned, for it departed from the ordinance of God.

THE HOLY PLACES OF WORSHIP: TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE

God Dwelling Among His People

The LORD dwelt in the midst of His people within sacred structures ordained of Him:

The Tabernacle — a movable tent of meeting, used during the wilderness wanderings.

The Temple — a permanent house in Jerusalem, wherein the LORD placed His name.

These holy places stood as visible signs that God chose to dwell among His people, to receive their offerings, and to meet with them in worship.

KEY TERMS

In the Holy Scriptures certain words are used to declare the sacredness of the place wherein the LORD was pleased to make His habitation among His people. *Miqdāsh* signifies “a holy place,” and thus setteth forth the holiness of God. *Mishkān* meant “a dwelling place,” declaring that the LORD dwelt in the midst of His people. *Ohel Mo’ed* is “the Tent of Meeting,” where God met with His congregation.

The Tabernacle, which was called *Hekal* in later usage, was moved from place to place, until Solomon built the Temple. The word *Hekal* signifies “a palace,” showing that the LORD is the King of Israel. David desired to build a house for the LORD, yet the LORD said that David’s son should build it ([2 Samuel 7](#)); whereby it was revealed that the true King is God Himself, and the Temple is His royal house.

Another word used for the Temple is *Bayith*, meaning “a house.” Sometimes it speaketh of an ordinary building, yet when it is spoken of the LORD, it signifies that place wherein God dwelled among His people ([1 Kings 8:10–13](#)).

In sum, all these words—*Miqdāsh* (holy place), *Mishkān* (dwelling place), *Ohel Mo’ed* (Tent of Meeting), *Hekal* (palace), and *Bayith* (house)—declare that a sacred place was necessary, wherein the LORD met with His people.

HOLY ACTS

In the Old Covenant, worship consisted of those specific acts which the LORD Himself commanded. These were not inventions of men, but ordained ways by which the people might show faithfulness and obedience unto God.

Sacrifices.

Beasts and offerings of grain were presented before the LORD. These sacrifices signified thanksgiving, repentance, and consecration ([Leviticus 1–7](#)).

Prayer.

The people prayed in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, seeking help, forgiveness, and blessing ([1 Kings 8:22–30](#)).

Singing and Music.

The Psalms were hymns of praise, thanksgiving, and trust. Music was a chief part of the worship of God ([Psalm 150](#)).

Feasts.

Three great feasts required pilgrimage unto the sanctuary:

- The Passover,
- The Feast of Weeks,
- The Feast of Tabernacles.

These feasts caused Israel to remember the mighty works of God in salvation ([Deuteronomy 16](#)).

All these acts had one purpose: worship was the people's answer of obedience and thanksgiving unto God.

HOLY ATTITUDES

Worship consisted not only in outward acts, but in the inward posture of the heart; for the LORD regarded the heart more than the sacrifice.

The Fear of God.

This signifies to honour the LORD, to take Him in holy earnestness, and to walk in obedience before Him.

Love toward God.

Israel was commanded to love the LORD their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)).

Joy.

Many Psalms show that gladness was found in drawing nigh unto God in worship ([Psalm 100](#)).

Humility.

The people came knowing that God is holy and they themselves are sinful. And when the outward acts were right, yet the heart was wrong, the LORD rejected such worship ([Isaiah 1:11–17](#)).

Thus the inward attitude was as weighty as the outward deed.

THE HOLY PURPOSE: TO MEET WITH GOD

The end of worship was to meet with God Himself. The LORD dwelt among His people in the Tabernacle and afterward in the Temple. The high priest entered once every year into the Most Holy Place, bearing the names of all Israel before the LORD.

Worship brought the people into the presence of God, that they might receive blessing, forgiveness, and guidance. This truth runneth throughout all of Scripture and findeth its fullness in Jesus Christ, in whom the presence of God is made known unto all that believe ([John 1:14](#)).

