

A Dispensational View of Worship

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Historically, Dispensationalists have been very strong in promoting their theology. To its credit, Dispensationalism has prompted among its followers great devotion both to Bible study and to evangelism. However, a strong conviction over dispensational worship is lacking in most works written from a dispensational perspective. One of the great challenges facing the development of a dispensational view of worship is the relative lack of extended New Testament discourses on the subject of worship. For this reason, the view of worship promoted by the Catholic and Reformed traditions borrows its liturgy from a spiritualized view of the Old Testament cultus with its exclusive priesthood, altar and temple. By way of contrast, the New Testament priesthood of the believer and lack of any physical altar/temple present an approach to worship that is vastly different in many respects from that found in the Old Testament.

Dispensationalism's tenet that there is an absolute distinction between Israel and the Church makes it incumbent upon the earnest Bible believer that he draw from the pages of the New Testament a clear understanding of what worship means for the church. The only extended discourse that pertains to worship for the church is to be found in Yeshu'a's presentation of this subject to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Most of Yeshu'a's pre-cross ministry was directed toward Israel and the presentation of the kingdom. But there are a few glimpses of church age teaching to be gleaned from the Savior's teachings – for example, the Upper Room Discourse, and, possibly, the “church” references in Matthew 16 and 18, and even perhaps some implications from the kingdom parables of Matthew 13. But clear and extended teaching on the

church dispensation is rarely found in the Gospel narratives. In light of this, it must be asked at the outset whether Yeshu‘a’s discourse about worship in John 4 rightly describes the church dispensation. His statement to the woman that, “an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21), requires that we understand His reference to be to the church age. Clearly, Jerusalem was the appropriate focal point of worship under the Law Dispensation and will be again in the Kingdom. Yeshu‘a’s reference in John 4, then, could only have been to the church dispensation. Thus, we find in His words to the Samaritan woman probably the only extended discourse in the New Testament on the subject of church-age worship.

Much confusion exists these days over just what worship is. Contemporary concepts of worship include music (praise songs, hymns), preaching, praying, dancing, raising hands, making the sign of the cross, burning incense, etc. The Emerging Church movement of the past decade only served to heighten this confusion.¹ Emergent leader Robert Webber was influential in many churches within the Protestant tradition to incorporate medieval Catholic practices in a quest to attain an “ancient future” experience.² Such a focus has led to contemporary worship practices such as prayer stations, burning of incense, labyrinths, stations of the cross, icons and candles. Consistent with Webber’s direction, Franky Schaeffer converted to Greek Orthodoxy in 1992 and enticed many evangelicals to leave evangelicalism and seek a meaningful experience in Eastern Orthodoxy. Schaeffer’s migration to Eastern Orthodoxy has resulted in the adoption of mystic eastern practices in some of today’s evangelical churches. Gary Thomas, director of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality offers the following very misleading comment: “Many New

¹ See Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone* (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007).

² Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999).

Testament figures observed religious rituals as well, teaching us that religion still has a place in our worship, even though the substance of Christianity is based on faith.”³ In an attempt to explain the need for ritual, Thomas cites with approbation the words of Gertrud Mueller Nelson, “The power of the Almighty needs, sometimes, to be guarded against but it also needs to be beckoned, called forth, and wooed.”⁴

Perhaps no feature of the expression of Christianity evidences as much diversity as the different modes of worship. It is apparent from Scripture that worship is incumbent upon the New Testament believer in Yeshu‘a. Our Lord Himself said, “The Father seeks such who worship Him” (John 4:23). However, from a dispensational point of view, one observes that the notion of worship does not receive nearly the same attention in the New Testament epistles as it does under the Mosaic covenant.⁵ Significant references to worship in the New Testament epistles are limited to a very few in number (Rom 12:1; 1Co 14:25; Phil 3:3).⁶

The problem of definition. One of the problems facing any discussion of worship is the definition of the word “worship.” Not only is there a wide discrepancy found among various dictionaries and encyclopedias, but there are also numerous Greek and Hebrew words variously translated as “worship” among the English versions. And then, there are descriptions of actions

³ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 72.

⁴ Ibid. 74. Gertrud Mueller Nelson is Director of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, Notre Dame, IN.

⁵ It is interesting that of six references to the word “worship” in the NASB translation of Hebrews, all six have reference either to worship under the Mosaic Covenant (9:1, 6, 9; 10:2), Patriarchal worship (11:21), or the worship offered to the Son by angels (1:6), none are in reference to worship by the church. And of 21 references to the word “worship” in the NASB translation of Revelation, not one occurs in chapters 2-3!

⁶ Much depends on how one understands the term “worship.” Some dynamic equivalent versions, such as NIV and NRSV use the English term “worship” much more frequently than the more formal equivalent versions such as NASB, ESV, HCSB.

and attitudes in the Bible that may be considered as “worship” by many people, even if the word “worship” does not occur in the text.

In Yeshu‘a’s discourse with the Samaritan woman, His rejection of both Mt. Gerizim and Jerusalem and His approval of both “spirit” and “truth” provide a basic framework for understanding a proper concept of worship in the present age. Furthermore, Yeshu‘a’s affirmation in the same discourse of the “Jews” as the proper source of salvation points us to the “spirit” underlying the temple worship system. The supreme expression of worship in the Jewish religious calendar is found in the Day of Atonement. Understanding the principles that underlay the practices on the Day of Atonement provide further insight into what is meant by worshipping “in spirit and in truth.” Both the discourse with the Samaritan woman and an understanding of the background of the Day of Atonement provide the Dispensationalist with the principles that should be used in evaluating whether a worship practice is truly Biblical.

I. The Discourse With the Samaritan Woman, John 4:20–24

The entire discourse with the Samaritan woman covers John 4:1-42. It may be outlined as follows:

- I. Introduction and Background, 4:1-6
- II. The Discourse, 4:7-26
 - A. Jewish/Samaritan Relations, 7-9, 20-22
 - B. Natural (well) water vs. “living” water, 10-15
 - C. Identification of the Prophet (Messiah or Samaritan *Taheb*), 16-26

D. True Spiritual Worship, 20-24

III. Conclusion, 4:27-42

The structure of the discourse is complicated, due to the fact that it is a conversation.⁷ The give-and-take of the subjects offered, subjects taken up, and subjects later reconsidered causes some overlap to occur in the topics. The topic of true spiritual worship is launched by, and partially overlaps the topic of Jewish/Samaritan Relationships (Samaritans worship on Mt. Gerizim, Jews worship in Jerusalem). It also overlaps with the topic of the Identification of the Prophet (Samaritan *Taheb* or Jewish Messiah⁸). As the conversation proceeds, one can trace the development of themes as the two speakers (the woman and Yeshu‘a) take turns speaking. The exposition below will be limited to verses 20-24 in developing the topic of true spiritual worship.

A. The Woman, 20

The Samaritan woman raised the issue of worship by her statement, “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain. But you yourselves say that in Jerusalem is the place where [we] ought to worship” (John 4:20). This issue of worship, as raised by the Samaritan woman, was not the main theme of Yeshu‘a’s discourse; nevertheless, by His extended digression into the topic

⁷ The controversial subject of Jewish/Samaritan relations is offered by the woman, but essentially ignored by Yeshu‘a; however, it serves as an introduction to the topic Yeshu‘a wishes to pursue, *viz.* “living water.” The topic of “true spiritual worship” comes up as a subtheme under the broader topic of the identification of the Messiah, and in a way, also addresses the Jewish/Samaritan issue. Thus, there are two primary themes in the entire discourse: (1) Living Water, and (2) The Identification of the Messiah. “True Spiritual Worship” is introduced as a significant subtheme. For a good discussion of the discourse structure of recorded conversations, see Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downer’s Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 257-92.

⁸ On the Samaritan “Messiah” known as the “*Taheb*,” see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 273.

(vv. 21-24), Yeshu‘a makes it clear that this is a significant subtheme He wishes to pursue. The woman’s question sets the stage for the discussion. Her focus is on the issue of holy places.

Throughout the religious history of mankind, certain places have been deemed more holy than others. Between the Jews and the Samaritans, there was disagreement over the appropriate site for the temple. The Jews insisted that Jerusalem was the God-appointed site, the Samaritans insisting upon Mt. Gerizim. That God had indeed appointed some site for the temple is made clear from Deuteronomy 12:5–7,

5 “But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. **6** “There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. **7** “There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

The Samaritan Pentateuch differs slightly from the Masoretic Text and Septuagint so as to indicate that the specified place of worship was, in fact, to be Mt. Gerizim, the mountain of blessing (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12; Joshua 8:33). Likewise, the Samaritan Pentateuch substitutes Mt. Gerizim for Mt. Ebal in Deuteronomy 27:4 so as to make Mt. Gerizim the site of Israel’s first altar in the Promised Land. This became the site of Samaritan worship of Yahweh and the location of their temple for Yahweh worship.

Theories as to the origin of the Samaritans vary, but two main theories predominate.

1. The Standard Jewish Rabbinic Theory.

Also adopted by the vast majority of Christian scholars, this theory maintains that the Samaritans originated during the Assyrian captivity when Gentiles imported to “the cities of

Samaria” by the Assyrians requested help against perceived divine judgment. In answer to their plea for help, the Assyrian king (Sargon II) brought in an Israelite priest to teach them how to worship the God of the land (2 Kings 17:24-28). According to this theory, the Samaritans are essentially Gentiles who adopted Yahweh worship according to the teachings of the Pentateuch. This theory likewise views the descendants of these “Samaritans” as the same group led by Sanballat the Horonite, governor of Samaria, rejected by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:10; 4:1ff.).

2. The Samaritan Explanation.

The Samaritans themselves have a radically different explanation of their origins. They claim to be descended from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, those who remained in the land after the Assyrians had deported most of the Israelites. They derive their name “Samaritan” (*Shomronit*) not from the city or region of “Samaria,” but from the Hebrew *shamar* (שמר) “to guard.” They consider themselves the “guardians” of the sacred, holy place appointed by God in Deuteronomy 12:5-7. Their belief is that David, the son of Jesse, was wrong in selecting Mt. Moriah as the site for the Jewish temple. The Samaritans had, in fact, built a temple to Yahweh on Mt. Gerizim⁹, though it had been destroyed by John Hyrcanus in about 128 BC. Their attachment was not to the city of Samaria, but to Mt. Gerizim. Their chief city was Shechem (some six miles southeast of Samaria), and would have included the surrounding villages, such as Sychar.

⁹ There is archaeological evidence of a temple on Mt. Gerizim as early as about 500 BC.

It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty which theory of the Samaritans' origin is correct; however, we can be certain that the Samaritan Explanation was also the view of the woman in John chapter four. She claimed quite certainly that Jacob was the forefather of the Samaritans (John 4:12), a point Yeshu'a did not dispute. Indeed, when she explained, "our fathers worshipped in this mountain" (v. 20) the referent to "our" (ἡμῶν) is ambiguous. One cannot be certain whether she meant "we Samaritans" or "we – i.e., both Jews and Samaritans." Jews may have questioned the legitimacy of the Samaritans as rightful claimants to be the people of God, but the Samaritans, while disagreeing with the Jews over the place of worship, conceded that both Jews and Samaritans had a rightful claim to be the people of God.

B. Yeshu'a, 21-24

1. The Unimportance of Jerusalem and Gerizim in the Coming Hour, 21.

The claim made by Yeshu'a here was most remarkable: "Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." He could not have been referring to the coming kingdom, since in the kingdom Jerusalem will be the undisputed capital of the world and the location of Yahweh's temple (Ezekiel 40ff.; Zechariah 8:22; Isaiah 2:2-3; 25:7; Matthew 23:37-39; Romans 11:26). Thus, Yeshu'a's reference to a coming hour in which Yahweh would be worshipped neither in Gerizim nor in Moriah must be a reference to worship in the church age. This corresponds well with other New Testament claims of the uniqueness of the church age dispensation as one in which all distinction between Jew and Gentile is eliminated (Eph 2:14-18;

Romans 3:22; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11) and the only “temple” is a spiritual one (Ephesians 2:21-22; 3:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

2. God's Chosen Program was through the Jews, 22.

Verse 22 contains a caveat to the generalization of verse 21. Though the physical sites of Gerizim and Jerusalem will be irrelevant with respect to the place of worship, still, Yeshu‘a acknowledged the validity of the Jerusalem faction over the Gerizim faction. He stated quite explicitly that “salvation is of the Jews.” So, though the physical location of the Jerusalem temple will become irrelevant to worship in the coming church age, the extended Jewish Scriptures, as opposed to the more limited, and possibly corrupt, Samaritan Pentateuch, should be sought as a source for authoritative revelation; the Mt. Gerizim claim by the Samaritans was based on an inferior version of the Scriptures.

3. Importance of "Spirit" and "Truth" in the Coming Hour, 23-24.

In contrast to the notion of worship being tied to a physical location – be it Gerizim or Jerusalem – Yeshu‘a stated that worship in the coming age was to be “in spirit and in truth.” The expression “in spirit” is not directly a reference to the Holy Spirit, but to the human spirit,¹⁰ and

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 270; Kenneth O. Gangel *John* in “Holman New Testament Commentary” (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 77; Calvin.

this comports well with the context. Worship in the church age is not dependent upon physical location or liturgical props. As clear New Testament teaching will later reveal, church-age worship will be focused within the human spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and will incorporate the notion of “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15-16; Philippians 3:3). It is inconceivable to the current writer that the Lord Yeshu‘a or His apostles would have contemplated the possibility of worshiping the Father by means of such liturgical props as incense, icons, labyrinths, prayer stations or church buildings with altars. Though it may be possible to incorporate such props and still worship God “in spirit,” it is no more likely that such props would be beneficial to worship than those associated with either the Gerizim or Jerusalem temples. Yeshu‘a’s words, “neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem,” suggest in the strongest possible way, that one should take a skeptical view of the use of physical props in the worship of the Father.

Closely associated with “in spirit” is the expression “in truth.” The Greek text has a single preposition (ἐν) with two objects (πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ), rather than repeating the preposition with the second object, thus the text argues for a close connection between these two. The connection is grammatically not as strong as a Granville-Sharpe construction, but strong, nevertheless. The context suggests that “truth” here refers to the Hebrew canon of Scripture as opposed to the Samaritan Pentateuch. If worship is to be understood correctly, it must correspond with principles derived from the Jewish Scriptures, the Tanak.

Verses 25-26 contain another exchange in the conversation between Yeshu‘a and the woman, but there is a resumption of the previous topic of the identification of the Messiah (or *Taheb*). Thus, with verse 24 the subject of true spiritual worship comes to a close.

II. The Day of Atonement

When Yeshu‘a specified that worship must be “in spirit and in truth,” His appeal to the “truth” was in reference to the Jewish canonical Scriptures, particularly as opposed to the inferior and possibly corrupt truth system of the Samaritans. The highest holy day in the Samaritan religious calendar is the Passover.¹¹ To this day, the Samaritans hold a highly publicized Passover ceremony on Mt. Gerizim, including the sacrifice of large numbers of paschal lambs. By way of contrast, the highest holy day for the Jew is the Day of Atonement.¹² Thus, the Day of Atonement may serve as a *crux interpretum* for discerning the principles of worship contained in the Hebrew Scriptures.

A. The Uniqueness of the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement is somewhat unique among the holy days of Israel. This uniqueness is to be seen in three observations:

¹¹ Alan D. Crown, *The Samaritans* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1989), 731.

¹² *Ibid.*

1. The Nature of the Day of Atonement as Affliction.

Most of the holy days were occasions for feasting, giving thanks and rejoicing in the presence of Yahweh. But on the Day of Atonement the Israelites were instructed to “afflict your souls” (אָת־נַפְשֵׁיְכֶם תְּעַנּוּ, Leviticus 16:29). The Piel stem of ענה signifies “to oppress, to do violence, to break.”¹³ The “affliction” or “humiliation” of the soul is taken by Jewish commentators to suggest the need for fasting, confession of sins and neglect of bodily adornment. Thus, the Day of Atonement becomes a day fasting, when other holy days are days of feasting; a day of mourning, when other holy days are days of rejoicing.

2. The Location of the Day of Atonement in the Sinai Treaty.

The uniqueness of the Day of Atonement is also suggested by its pivotal location in the Sinai treaty. Dorsey outlines the Sinai treaty as follows:

1. Yahweh’s holiness, Ex 19:3-25
2. The Ten Commandments, Ex 20:3-17
3. Civil Law Codes, Ex 21:2-23:19
4. Tabernacle Instructions, Ex 24:12-34:28
5. Aaron’s sin and Moses’ intervention, Ex 31:18-34:28

¹³ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 853.

6. Building the Tabernacle, Ex 34:29-40:38

7. Sacrificial Regulations, Lev 1-10

8. Purity Regulations, Lev 11-18

9. Laws pertaining to holiness #1, 19:1-26:46

10. Laws pertaining to holiness #2, Lev 27:1-Nu 10:10¹⁴

This places the Day of Atonement among the “Purity Regulations” of Leviticus 11-18. These are further subdivided by Dorsey into two major subdivisions and several further subdivisions within these as follows:

- a. Main collection of ritual purity laws, 11:1-16:34
 - i. Ritual impurity from eating or touching the carcasses of animals classified as repulsive to eat, 11:1-47
 - ii. Ritual impurity from childbirth discharges, 12:1-8
 - iii. Ritual impurity from “leprosy” on skin, 13:1-59
 - iv. Rectification of ritual impurity from “leprosy,” 14:1-32
 - v. Ritual impurity from “leprosy” on walls of house, 14:33-57
 - vi. Ritual impurity from bodily discharges, 15:1-33
- b. Day of Atonement, when all ritual impurity is rectified, 16:1-34**
- c. Additional, more serious, purity laws, 17:1-18:30

¹⁴ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis – Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 72-82.

- i. Offensive behavior in eating sacrifices, 17:1-16
- ii. Offensive moral behavior that defiles, 18:1-30¹⁵

Placed as it is immediately before the more serious purity laws regarding eating sacrifices and offensive moral behavior that defiles, the section on the Day of Atonement forms a crucial hinge in the holiness code between those actions that, on the one hand *are not* primarily a result of man's willful moral choice, and those actions that, on the other hand *are* a result of man's willful moral choice. This will be a crucial observation in discerning the underlying principle of worship to be seen in the Day of Atonement.

3. The Corrective Character of the Day of Atonement.

Among the ritual purity laws, only the Day of Atonement has this unique introductory formula: "Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died." The death of Nadab and Abihu is recorded in Leviticus 10:1-11 and was due to their offering of "unauthorized fire." At that time, the tabernacle had already been constructed, the priests had already been anointed and commissioned, and Israel's worship system had been put in place. There is a sense in which one could understand the Day of Atonement as a corrective added to the worship system after abuses of worship had occurred.

¹⁵ Ibid, 77-78.

B. The Nature of Nadab and Abihu's Offense.

There was both an immediate cause and a deeper principled reason for God's judgment against Nadab and Abihu. According to Leviticus 10:1, the immediate cause of Nadab and Abihu's judgment was that they "offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them." The expression "strange fire" (NASB) is a translation of אֵשׁ זָרָה probably better rendered "unauthorized fire."¹⁶ There were at least three things that may have made their fire unauthorized.

1. The Time of the Offering.

According to Exodus 30:7-9, the fire was to be offered twice a day, at the time when Aaron tended to the menorah. Exodus 30:9 specifically forbade the offering of "unauthorized incense" (קִטְרֹת זָרָה). It is possible that Nadab and Abihu approached the presence of Yahweh at some time other than that prescribed in Exodus 30 and thus the fire was "unauthorized." Perhaps they reasoned that, if it was a good thing to approach Yahweh with incense twice a day, it could only be a better thing to approach him with incense more than twice a day.

¹⁶ Koehler and Baumgartner, 279.

2. The Components of the “Fire.”

It is also possible, based on Exodus 30, that the incense offered by Nadab and Abihu was not mixed according to the prescription of Exodus 30:34-38. This incense was to be of a special mixture used only for this purpose and none other. It is possible that Nadab and Abihu thought their own recipe was an improvement. Perhaps they reasoned that what seemed to be a more pleasing aroma to them, would also be a more pleasing aroma to Yahweh.

3. The Manner in Which it Was Offered.

A further problem with Nadab and Abihu’s offering is implied by the prohibition of Leviticus 10:9, “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations.” Though the text does not explicitly state that Nadab and Abihu were intoxicated when they offered the unauthorized fire, the implication that they were is quite strong. This prohibition is given as a consequence of Nadab and Abihu’s misconduct. The fact is, that the use of alcohol clouds the mind and results in poor judgment, lack of self-control and overconfidence in one’s own will. It is entirely possible that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of intoxicating drink – maybe not entirely inebriated, but under just enough influence to free up their thinking and get the “creative juices flowing.” Perhaps under such an influence they reasoned that they could improve on the restrictive worship forms required by Moses’ commands.

C. The Corrective Offered by the Day of Atonement.

In addition to offering unauthorized fire, there appears to have been a deeper, principled explanation of Nadab and Abihu's offense. Directly after the reference to Nadab and Abihu's deaths in Leviticus 16:1, verse 2 states, "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die." On the one hand, this lends support for the timing of the offering of fire constituting the primary explanation for Nadab and Abihu's offense, but there is also a deeper implicit principle to be seen. It was Nadab and Abihu's presumption that they could approach God in their own way that constituted their erroneous view of worship. In other words, it was an issue of *willfulness*. It was not so much important that Nadab and Abihu understand why incense should only be offered twice a day, but it was of supreme importance that they submit their wills to the will of God and bring the incense the way He had directed. They were guilty of elevating their own will above the will of God. The Day of Atonement's restriction that God's presence can now be approached only one day out of the year, and then only by the high priest, sharpens our understanding of the seriousness of Nadab and Abihu's willfulness, but it also points to what may ultimately be the heart of worship itself. Man's reasoning may suggest that if approaching God with incense twice a day is good, then to do so more than twice a day would be better, but God says, No. You shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil. Worship is not a matter of man's cleverness or creativity. Worship is a matter of man's submitting his will to the revealed will of God. This is essentially what Yeshu'a meant when He insisted that worship must be "in ... truth" (John 4:23). The truth by which Yahweh is to be worshiped is the revealed truth of His Word. When man submits his will to God's revealed will, he has in essence worshiped God.

Conclusion

Worship is often confused with outward forms, liturgies and the use of props. However, Yeshu‘a directed attention to the true essence of worship – that which is spiritual, internal and a matter of the submission of man’s will to the will of God. An examination of both Yeshu‘a’s discourse with the Samaritan woman and the institution of the Day of Atonement yields three significant principles that must shape an understanding of worship from a Dispensationalist’s perspective: (1) Worship is in spirit, neither tied to a physical locality nor dependent upon the use of physical props; (2) Worship is in truth, that is, it must correspond with what is revealed in the Word of God, even if contrary to human reasoning; and (3) Worship consists essentially of man’s submitting his will to the revealed will of God.

Numerous Biblical examples of worship serve to illustrate the validity of these three principles.

1. Abraham on Mt. Moriah, Genesis 22:1-2, 11-14

When Abraham was commanded by God to offer his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah he obeyed fully. This act of worship did not seem reasonable to Abraham. Abraham would never have conceived of the idea of offering his own son as a sacrifice. In fact, having been so commanded, Abraham fully expected that God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (Hebrews 11:17-19). Abraham’s worship consisted not in his actually

slaying Isaac, but in his willingness to obey God. The angel of Yahweh revealed this to Abraham when he said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). By submitting his will to the will of God, Abraham had offered acceptable worship to God.

2. Jacob Worshiping at the Head of his Bed, Genesis 47:29–31

As Jacob’s life drew to an end, he requested from Joseph that he not be buried in Egypt but be carried to the ancestral burial site in Hebron. With Joseph as the second most powerful man on earth, Jacob could have had virtually anything he wanted. He could easily have had a most ornate burial according to all the glories of Egypt, perhaps even a great pyramid for his tomb. However, years earlier, God had revealed that His purposes for Jacob and his descendants lay, not in Egypt, but in the land of Canaan (35:9-12). At that time, Canaan was suffering from many years of severe drought and had little to offer, humanly speaking. By turning down the glory offered by Egypt in favor of the hope offered by the promise of God’s Word, Jacob is said to have “worshiped” God (Genesis 47:31 *וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה*). Jacob’s “worship” consisted in submitting his will to the revealed will of God and had nothing to do with any external rituals, liturgies or altars.

3. Solomon Praying for Wisdom, 2 Chronicles 1:7-12

In stark contrast to the thousand burnt offerings Solomon offered on the brazen altar (2 Chronicles 1:6), God is said to have been pleased later that night in Solomon's prayer for wisdom. God had made an offer to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you" (verse 7). Solomon replied, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can rule this great people of Thine?" Why was this so pleasing to God? Because this alone would allow Solomon to understand and know God's will. Solomon desired to know the will of God that he might submit to that will.

4. Jesus in the Garden: "Not My Will but Thine be Done," Luke 22:39-43

If not an actual instance of worship (Can the Second Person of the Trinity "worship" the First Person?), these immortal words of our Savior certainly embody the spirit and essence of worship. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Clearly, worship can take place within the confines of physical temples and can incorporate various liturgies and props. Much of the worship associated with the Mosaic dispensation did so, and much of the worship in the millennial kingdom will do so. But these things are not essential to worship. A dispensational view of worship will reject any notion of temples and altars as legitimate features of church age worship, and will certainly take a dim view of the use of such props as incense, candles, prayer stations and labyrinths. To be sure, music has some place in the worship of the church (Colossians 3:16), but one should not confuse

music with worship. Music may aid worship. Music may prepare one's heart for worship. But music is not to be equated with worship. Worship consists essentially of the submission of one's will to the will of God, especially in response to the teaching of the Word of God.

One worships when thanking God for *all* things. Thanking God is acknowledging that His will is best. One worships when saying "yes" to His will. One worships by reading the Word with a conscious decision to obey it. One worships when living moment-by-moment seeking to understand His will so as to obey it.

An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

John 4:23

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