Engaging with God: a biblical theology of worship

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Introduction

Worship is the supreme and only indispensable activity of the Christian Church. It alone will endure, like the love for God which it expresses, into heaven, when all other activities of the Church will have passed away. It must therefore, even more strictly than any of the less essential doings of the Church, come under the criticism and control of the revelation on which the Church is founded.¹

Considering the outpouring of books on worship in recent years, it is obviously a subject of great interest and importance for contemporary Christians. Yet, sadly, worship is an issue that continues to divide us, both across the denominations and within particular congregations. Even those who desire to bring their theology and practice under the criticism and control of the biblical revelation can find themselves in serious conflict with one another. Most of us are more conditioned by custom and personal preference in this matter than we would care to admit!

Despite the so-called 'experiments in worship' that are widespread today, church-goers regularly express dissatisfaction and confess that they are still uncertain about the meaning and purpose of what is commonly called worship. Many are defensive about their traditions because they cannot see the need for significant change. Some wander from church to church, looking
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for the particular pattern of ministry that appeals to them. Above all, what seems to be so lacking in congregational life, and in books purporting to advise us about church services, is any serious attempt to grapple with a broadly based biblical theology of worship. What, after all, does the Bible mean by `worship' and how does it relate to the other great issues of the Christian life?

What really is worship?

In everyday speech, Christian worship is usually identified with certain public religious activities, such as going to church or more particularly singing hymns, saying prayers, listening to sermons or participating in the Lord's Supper. Yet few would want to deny that private devotions are an important aspect of worship. Scripture indicates in various ways that a genuine relationship with God will be grounded in a life of personal prayer and praise. Indeed, one of the issues in the contemporary scene is a hungering for more self-expression and personal fulfilment in church services. People want to be stirred and challenged, or comforted and consoled, at an individual level. They want church services to be a source of encouragement for them in their everyday discipleship. Although this may to some extent reflect the preoccupation of our age with self-development and self-realization, it is a reminder that genuine worship will have both a private and a public dimension.

Is worship, then, essentially an experience or feeling? Is it to be identified with a special sense of the presence of God, or with some kind of religious ecstasy or with expressions of deep humiliation before God? Are there special moments in a Christian meeting when we are truly `worshipping' God? Are church services to be measured by the extent to which they enable the participants to enter into such experiences? Such a subjective approach is often reflected in the comments people make about Christian gatherings, but it has little to do with biblical teaching on the matter. Furthermore, it creates significant problems for relationships amongst Christians, since not all will share in the same experience and some will
inevitably be made to feel that their worship is inferior. Worship must involve certain identifiable attitudes, but something is seriously wrong when people equate spiritual self-gratification with worship!²

Words, words, words

A traditional starting-point for discussions about Christian worship has been the observation that the English word `worship' means by derivation `to attribute worth', suggesting that to worship God is to ascribe to him supreme worth. This definition draws attention to the notion that we are to render to God the glory or praise that is due to him (e.g. Ps. 96:7-8; Rev. 5:12), but does it provide an adequate basis for exposing the totality of scriptural teaching on the subject? Worship defined in this way need not have anything at all to do with the particularity of biblical revelation. It leaves open the possibility of people making their own assessment of God's worth and the response which they consider to be adequate.³

The fact that some worship in the Old Testament was regarded as unacceptable to God (e.g. Gn. 4:3-7; Ex. 32; Is. 1), is a reminder that what is impressive or seems appropriate to us may be offensive to him. When New Testament writers talk about acceptable worship, they similarly imply that there are attitudes and activities that are definitely not pleasing to God (e.g. Rom. 12:1-2; 14:17-18; Heb. 12:28-29; 13:16).

There is a large vocabulary of words in Scripture that can contribute to our understanding of the whole theme or doctrine of worship. One of the aims of this book is to discover what can be learned from observing how certain key worship terms are used in both Old and New Testaments. If a definition of worship is to be attempted, it cannot simply be based on the derivation or common application of the English word `worship'.

Worship as a life orientation

The theme of worship is far more central and significant in Scripture than many Christians imagine. It is intimately linked with all the major emphases of biblical theology such as creation, sin, covenant, redemption, the people of God and the future hope. Far from being a peripheral subject, it has to do with the
fundamental question of how we can be in a right relationship with God and please him in all that we do. One way or another, most of the books from Genesis to Revelation are concerned with this issue.

Although there is a preoccupation with what may be termed specifically 'religious' activities in various Old Testament contexts, ritual provisions are set within the broader framework of teaching about life under the rule of God. In fact, worship theology expresses the dimensions of a life orientation or total relationship with the true and living God. This becomes even more obvious when the theme of worship in the New Testament is examined. Contemporary Christians obscure the breadth and depth of the Bible's teaching on this subject when they persist in using the word 'worship' in the usual, limited fashion, applying it mainly to what goes on in Sunday services.

Christianity emerged at a time when Jewish and pagan authors were giving new interpretations to old ideas about worship. How different is the perspective of the New Testament writers and why do they adapt the familiar terminology of worship as they do? How do they envisage that God is to be approached, honoured and adored?

Such questions cannot be answered simply by examining what the early Christians did when they met together, or by reflecting on what they said about the significance of those gatherings. The first disciples were drawn into what may be called a worshipping relationship with Jesus Christ on the basis of his words and actions, culminating in his death and resurrection and the consequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Following his own example, they began to use some of the language of worship to indicate the significance of his person and work and to explore the dimensions of the relationship with God which they now enjoyed in him. Jesus' teaching about the functions of the Jewish temple being fulfilled by him began one line of development. His teaching about his death as a sacrifice inaugurating a new covenant was another source of inspiration for early Christian theology.

Worship in the New Testament is a comprehensive category describing the Christian's total existence. It is coextensive with the faith-response wherever and whenever that response is elic-
ITED. CONSEQUENTLY, "OUR TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP AS
RESTRICTED TO THE CULTIC GATHERING OF THE CONGREGATION AT A DESIGN-
NATED TIME AND PLACE FOR RITE AND PROCLAMATION WILL NO LONGER DO.
THIS IS NOT WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT MEANS BY WORSHIP."4

DIVINE AND HUMAN ACTION

There is no doubt that Scripture has much to say about the part
we play in the adoration and service of God. So, worship is often
defined quite broadly as our response to God.5 However, there is
an important theological context to be considered when worship
is presented in such terms. That is, we need to ask what role God
plays in the engagement or relationship which is true and
acceptable worship. At one level we must discover from his own
self-revelation in Scripture what pleases him. We cannot simply
determine for ourselves what is honouring to him.

More fundamentally, the Bible tells us that God must draw us
into relationship with himself before we can respond to him
acceptably.6 The worship provisions of the Old Testament are
presented as an expression of the covenant relationship estab-
lished by God between himself and Israel. Similarly, in the New
Testament, worship theology is intimately connected with the
establishment and outworking of the new covenant. Acceptable
worship under both covenants is a matter of responding to God's
initiative in salvation and revelation, and doing so in the way
that he requires.

In particular, we need to take seriously the extraordinary
biblical perspective that acceptable worship is something made
possible for us by God. Of special significance in this regard is the
Old Testament teaching about God drawing near to Israel so
that his people might draw near to him. The New Testament
points to the fulfilment of these ideas in the person and work of
Jesus Christ. Again, the Old Testament teaches that the sacrifi-
cial system, which was given by God to be the means of dealing
with the problem of sin and maintaining covenant relationship
with his people, was only effective because of his promise and his
gracious enabling. Such teaching finds important expression in
the New Testament focus on Christ's death as the means by
which we are sustained in an eternal relationship with God.
Engaging with God

In one sense this whole study is an attempt to define the nature of Christian worship, so that no comprehensive definition can be offered until important questions have been faced. How can God be known and approached? What must God do to enable his people to meet with him? What difference has the coming of Jesus made to biblical perspectives on this subject? What is the relationship between the activities of the Christian meeting and what we may call the worship of everyday life? Nevertheless, as I begin to answer these questions, I will test the hypothesis that the worship of the living and true God is essentially *an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.*

How does this book approach the subject?

Before any exploration of New Testament theology can take place, there is a need to understand how people in the ancient world thought that God or the gods should be honoured. This book begins with a focus on some of the beliefs and practices of Old Testament religion, as a background for expounding New Testament perspectives. The second chapter examines the use of some key words for worship in the Old Testament and non-biblical writings. Here the question of definition is faced again, as different dimensions of Israel's engagement with God are uncovered. Observing the way that various New Testament writers employ the language of worship, and looking carefully at the relevant context in each case, subsequent chapters seek to establish a particular writer's theology of worship. Word studies lead into a broader historical and theological investigation of the theme in the relevant New Testament books.

The method followed here is that of biblical theology, which attempts to study God and his scriptural revelation with a special emphasis on the historical context of each section of Scripture. Systematic theology builds toward a *system*; dogmatic theology enunciates and defends *dogmas*; philosophic and speculative theologies rationally *philosophize* and speculate; however,
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biblical theology seeks to exegete and present that which each inspired Bible writer is himself *in situ* presenting. This discipline aims to bring the contents of the Bible to a greater degree of systematization than is found immediately in the Bible itself, but to remain `as close as possible to the method God himself has used in giving us his revelation'. As well as interpreting key passages in their immediate context, this method seeks to expose the progressive and developing character of God's revelation within the pages of Scripture. This perspective can be lost or obscured by any attempt to organize and integrate the biblical evidence on purely logical or thematic grounds.

Considering the urgency of the practical issues raised in this introduction, some readers may feel frustrated at the prospect of a detailed analysis of biblical teaching when they are looking for advice about improving next Sunday's church services! I believe, however, that we have enough how-to-do-it books and not enough reflection on worship as a total biblical idea. Worship is a subject that should dominate our lives seven days a week. Vitality and meaning will not be restored to Christian gatherings until those who lead and those who participate can recover a biblical perspective on their meetings, seeing them in relation to God's total plan and purpose for his people. Nevertheless, this book offers important practical conclusions as the argument progresses and it is my hope that it will contribute significantly to the renewal of Christian life and witness, when congregations gather, and when they move out again to serve God in their everyday lives.

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keen insight and helpful comments. This work is dedicated with much affection to my sons, Mark, Chris and Daniel.

Notes
2. G. Kendrick, *Worship* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1984 = *Learning to Worship as a Way of Life*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985, p. 32), rightly condemns a particular expression of this: ‘as if the highest achievement of our whole pilgrimage on earth was to enter some kind of praise-induced ecstasy!’
3. Note the helpful criticism of this common approach to the subject by P. W. Hoof, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 91-94.
4. P. W. Hoof, *Worship*, p. 17 (cf. also pp. 31-32). Nevertheless, Hoof’s own study proceeds on the basis of the traditional understanding because he admits that a radical new mind-set is required to deal effectively with such biblical insights in relation to liturgical thinking.
6. Note the helpful discussion of this issue by C. E. B. Cranfield, ‘Divine and Human Action. The Biblical Concept of Worship’, *Interpretation* 12, 1958, pp. 387-398. However, I think his argument for a special presence of Christ in baptism or the Lord’s Supper is arbitrary.
7. Put another way, worship in the Bible may be viewed as a ‘reciprocal exchange’ between God and his people, expressed in word and action, according to C. Westerman, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (ET, Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 187. However, it seems to me that Westerman has too readily conceded that worship in the Old Testament is essentially a cultic or institutional expression of the relationship with God.
9. F. I. Andersen, ‘Biblical Theology’, pp. 65-66. Earlier, Andersen says: ‘As soon as any extra-Biblical elements provide the hidden ground of theology, when they supply criteria by which evaluations of Biblical material are made, when they furnish the framework on which Biblical information is arranged, the result may be Biblical in appearance but unbiblical in its inner substance’ (p. 63).
He has revealed his word to Jacob, 
his laws and decrees to Israel. 
He has done this for no other nation; 
they do not know his laws.

Praise the LORD.

(Ps. 147:19-20)

For many Christians, the Old Testament remains a mysterious and seemingly irrelevant book. At no point does it appear more distant from the needs and aspirations of people in secularized cultures than when it focuses on the temple, the sacrificial system and the priesthood. Yet these institutions were at the very heart of ancient thinking about worship and their significance must be grasped if New Testament teaching is to be properly understood. Most books on Christian worship focus too narrowly on what people said and did in New Testament times. They fail to highlight fundamental beliefs about engaging with God that are common to both sections of the biblical canon.

A theology of worship must consider key themes such as revelation, redemption, God's covenant with Israel and the call for his people to live as a distinct and separate nation. Once the connection between worship and these themes is established and traced through to the New Testament, the distinctiveness of
biblical teaching emerges. This becomes even clearer when bibli-
cal perspectives are compared with pagan thinking and practice 
in the ancient world.

What the New Testament says about worship, however, also 
sometimes stands in stark contrast to the perspectives of the Old 
Testament. Despite the continuity between the Testaments, the 
gospel demands a transformation of many of the traditional 
categories and patterns of worship. History shows that 
Christians have sometimes wrongly applied Old Testament 
terms and concepts to the church and different aspects of 
Christian worship. One of the aims of this book is, therefore, 
to expose the discontinuity between the Testaments on this 
subject.

Worship and revelation

Holy places in the ancient world

The great concern of people in the ancient world was to know 
where the presence of a god could be found and to know the 
names of gods so that they could be approached and communion 
with them established. Certain localities came to be identified as 
the dwelling-places of the gods, and here altars were erected and 
patterns of worship established. Part of the tradition of the 
shrine or temple would be the story of how the place had come to 
be recognized as the abode of the god. If there were several 
sanctuaries dedicated to the same god, it was recognized that 
they were but copies of the god's true dwelling-place, like Mount 
Olympus in Greek mythology, which remained remote from the 
world of humanity.¹

Even in cultures where no prominence was given to elaborate 
temples, knowing the place where a god's presence could be 
found was still extremely important. The people of Canaan, 
among whom the Israelites came to dwell, had their own flour-
ishing religion, involving many simple sanctuaries dedicated to 
the gods Baal, El and Anat. According to the Ras Shamra texts, 
which reveal much of Canaanite mythology in the fifteenth 
century BC and earlier, each of these gods is said to have had a
dwelling-place on a particular sacred mountain, at some inaccessible point where heaven and earth meet.² From such mountains their rule over the land and their influence upon its life were believed to flow.

*The covenant-making God of Israel*

Against this background, the Old Testament affirms that the one and only creator and lord of the universe had made himself known to the forefathers of Israel at particular times and in particular places. In so doing, he initiated a relationship with Abraham, which was later confirmed with Isaac, Jacob and his descendants, promising to make them into a great nation. They were to possess the land of Canaan and be uniquely blessed by God, so that all the peoples on earth might be blessed through them (e.g. Gn. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-8, 12-16). In this way it was shown that a relationship with the true God could be enjoyed only on the basis of his own self-revelation in history.

It is a distinctive feature of Old Testament religion that when God revealed himself more was involved than displays of power in nature or supernatural phenomena. Words of covenant promise and demand lie at the heart of God's encounters with the patriarchs. Even before God engaged with them in this way, the Bible indicates that those who called upon him and sought to serve him did so within the context of his continuing communication with them (e.g. Noah in Gn. 6–9).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built altars throughout Canaan to mark the sites where God manifested himself to them under various names (e.g. Gn. 12:7-8; 13:14-18; 28:10-22). Sacrifice was not offered at any spot which might happen to be convenient, but only at those sites in particular.³ In this way, it was demonstrated that God's promises were believed by those who received them, that the land actually belonged to him and that he would give it to his people at the appropriate time. Since heaven was recognized as his actual dwelling-place (e.g. Gn. 11:5; 18:21; 21:17; 22:11; 24:7; 28:12), it was not considered that God was limited to special holy places but that he had simply chosen to manifest his character and will for his people at such sites. As 'the God of Abraham', `the God of Isaac' and `the God of Jacob', he was also linked to certain definite persons, as well as certain
definite places. In short, `the religion of the patriarchs shows a real personal communion between men and the deity who acted as their leader'.

The decisive manifestation of God's glory and power to Israel was at Mount Sinai, after his mighty act of redeeming them from Egypt. The exodus had to take place before the promises made to their forefathers could be fulfilled and further revelation could be given. In drawing the people to that mountain, God was drawing them to himself (Ex. 19:4). At `the mountain of God' (3:1; 4:27; 18:5; 24:13), Israel was enabled to approach God and acknowledge him as rescuer and lord. Here the terms of the relationship were set out in great detail and the pattern for acceptable worship was laid down by God.

In the `Song of Moses' (Ex. 15:1-18), which celebrates the victory of the exodus and the anticipated conquest of Canaan, the whole land promised to Israel is described as the `mountain' of God's inheritance, the place chosen by their redeemer for his dwelling (v. 17, cf. Ps. 78:54). It is `the sanctuary' where God's presence may be found and from where `the LORD will reign for ever and ever' (v. 18). This concept finds its ultimate expression in the Old Testament in the choice of Mount Zion as the temple site and as the place to which, in the prophetic view of the future, all the nations must eventually come in pilgrimage to Israel's God (e.g. Is. 2:1-3).

**Worship and redemption**

The worship of God's people in the Bible is distinctive in that it is regularly presented as the worship offered by those who have been redeemed. Acceptable worship does not start with human intuition or inventiveness, but with the action of God. The earliest books of the Bible emphasize God's initiative in revealing his character and will to his people, rescuing them from other lords in order to serve him exclusively, and establishing the pattern of response by which their relationship with him could be maintained. Scholars have shown many parallels between Old Testament religious practices and those of other nations in
the ancient world, but what remains unique in the Bible is the theological framework within which the various rituals and institutions were understood and used.

Mount Sinai and the faith of Israel

Fundamental to the faith which united the twelve tribes of Israel was the revelation of God at Horeb or Mount Sinai. This unique encounter explains Israel's sense of God's special presence with them, and indicates why they regarded themselves as his holy people and bound to relate to him in a distinctive way. The book of Exodus is especially important for our study because it establishes a clear connection between Israel's pattern of approach to God and his redemptive purposes for his people. The significance of this portion of Scripture for an understanding of certain New Testament perspectives on worship can hardly be exaggerated.

The early chapters of Exodus suggest that a pilgrimage to meet God at `the mountain of God' is the immediate focus of the narrative, and that liberation from slavery in Egypt was for the purpose of divine service or `worship'. Exodus 3 records a prior meeting between God and Moses on the mountain. Here God assured Moses that he would rescue his people from slavery in Egypt and give them possession of the land promised to their forefathers (vv. 7-10). At the same time, Moses was told, `When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain' (v. 12). The precise meaning of such terminology will be investigated in the next chapter, but a number of requests from Moses to Pharaoh about this meeting with God suggest that it would certainly involve sacrifice and the holding of a religious festival. On that mountain, the special name by which Israel was to call upon God was also revealed (vv. 13-15). It is usually represented in English translations as `the LORD', but sometimes as `Yahweh'.

With the redemption from Egypt accomplished and Israel gathered at Sinai, we are told that Moses went up the mountain to meet God. There he was instructed to remind the people of how the LORD had graciously brought them to himself by his mighty acts on their behalf (19:3-4). Moses was then told to declare to the assembled Israelites what it meant to be the
people whom God had uniquely drawn into relationship with himself:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6).

Such terminology suggests that the engagement with God at Sinai was to inaugurate a total-life pattern of service or worship for the nation. Their salvation had been in fulfilment of the covenant made with the patriarchs and now they were being told how to keep that covenant and live out the relationship it implied.

A common factor in the three terms describing Israel's vocation here (`my treasured possession', `a kingdom of priests', `a holy nation') is the note of separation from the nations in order to be uniquely at God's disposal. The Israelites were drawn into a special or sanctified relationship with God from amongst the nations. They were chosen to demonstrate what it meant to live under the direct rule of God, which is actually `the biblical aim for the whole world'. As such, they were to be the means by which God's original promise to Abraham of bringing blessing to all the nations would be enacted (cf. Gn. 12:1-3). As a priestly kingdom, they were to serve the LORD exclusively and thus be a people through whom his character and will might be displayed to the world. Just as a priest is separated from an ancient society in order to serve it and serves it by his distinctiveness, so Israel serves her world by maintaining her distance and her difference from it."

The giving of the words of God

The remainder of Exodus 19 deals with the special preparations of the Israelites for their encounter with God and the account of the actual theophany or manifestation of God to them. Moses was to set boundaries around the mountain for the protection of the people, with special instructions regarding its approach and severe warnings concerning the breaking of those boundaries.
The people were to be ritually pure so that they could approach God, on his terms, at his holy mountain. The awesomeness of the theophany is then conveyed with imagery that attempts to identify something supernatural and essentially indescribable. Here God in his majestic holiness confronted them and intruded into their lives. Significantly, God spoke to Moses in the midst of this display of his power and glory. Indeed, it is stated that the purpose of this awesome manifestation was to enable Israel always to trust in Moses as the mediator of God's will (v. 9). The outworking of that trust would be obedience to the words of God (cf. v. 8).

Exodus 20 reinforces the idea that Israel's relationship with God was not to be at the level of the mysterious and the irrational. They were to enjoy a personal and moral fellowship with the one who gave his ten 'words' or commandments as an integral part of the whole experience of his coming to them. These state the fundamental principles of living in a relationship with the God who had graciously brought them 'out of the land of slavery' and consecrated them to himself. Their call for exclusive devotion to the God who had redeemed them involved not only the avoidance of idolatry, the sanctifying of God's name, and the observance of the sabbath (vv. 1-11), but also obedience to God in the everyday relationships of family and nation (vv. 12-17). The lengthy collection of laws or judgments' in Exodus 20:22 – 23:33 functioned as an application of those principles for various aspects of life in the promised land. In this way, the implications of being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' were set forth. A similar mix of moral, social and ritual laws is found throughout Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, indicating what it meant for Israel to serve the LORD. The idea that acceptable worship is a total-life orientation is not a new discovery by the writers of the New Testament!

The ratification of the covenant is recorded in Exodus 24 in a sequence which begins with the invitation to Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel to 'come up to the LORD' and to 'worship at a distance'. Only Moses was to 'approach the LORD' directly. As a prelude to this promised encounter with God, Moses built an altar and twelve pillars to
represent the twelve tribes, offered sacrifices, recited `the book of the covenant' to which the people willingly assented, and sprinkled sacrificial blood on altar and people, asserting that `this is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made' (vv. 3-8). The meal which this representative group of Israelites shared in God's presence (v. 11), in the context of this sacrificial ritual, was a means of confirming the relationship established between God and his people. Despite their nearness to God, no harm befell them. The message of the chapter is clear: Israel could draw near to God in his holiness only because of his gracious initiative and provision. By means of the exodus event, God had set them apart from the nations and drawn them to himself, sealing that relationship with `the blood of the covenant', thus confirming the sanctified status of the nation as a whole.

Worship and the cult

Like other nations in the ancient world, Israel expressed its relationship with God through sacrifice and ritual, using sacred enclosures, and depending upon the mediation of priests. In other words, it had what is technically called a cult. In general terms this means `the expression of religious experience in concrete external actions performed within the congregation or community, preferably by officially appointed exponents and in set forms'. Modern use of the word `cult' to describe particular (usually extreme) religious groups should not be allowed to confuse this issue.

In contrast with the many cults of paganism, one national cult, with a single sanctuary, is contemplated in Deuteronomy 12. The prophets later condemned any departure from this ideal, viewing such as a symptom of spiritual decline (e.g. 1 Ki. 12:26 – 14:20). The cult had a very important religious and social function, distinguishing between the areas of the sacred and the profane, integrating the individual within the community of God's people, and reminding the sanctified community of the basis and significance of its life in relation to God. In a number of ways, the Israelite cult corresponded to those of the heathen
world. Yet, given such similarities, it is again important to discern what was not the same in Israel, or what was given new meaning within the framework of God's revelation to his people.

*The significance of the tabernacle*

The instructions in Exodus 25 – 31 are presented as further revelation to Moses during his time alone with God on the top of Sinai. The Israelites were to bring the finest materials as a free-will offering to the LORD, for the construction of a sanctuary (Hebrew, *miqdās*, 'holy place', 25:8). They were to make a tabernacle (*miskán*, `dwelling', 25:9), with furnishings exactly like the pattern that God would show them, so that God himself might dwell among them (*sákàn*). The divine presence in Israel was not to be linked to any kind of image, since they saw `no form of any kind' when God spoke to them at Horeb out of the fire (Dt. 4:14-20). Nevertheless, God's continuing presence with them was to be proclaimed and expressed by this tent-sanctuary. Exodus 25 then provides the specifications for the ark, which was to be kept inside the tabernacle, and details the items which were to be kept near the ark, namely the table for `the bread of the presence' and the lampstand.

In some Old Testament contexts the ark, without any mention of the tabernacle, is specifically the symbol of God's continuing presence with his people (e.g. Nu. 10:33-36; iSa. 4:3-9). Since the ark was a chest containing the tables of the covenant, it clearly also represented God's words to them and therefore his rule over Israel (Ex. 25:10-22; Dt. 10:1-5). God promised to meet with Moses and give him all his commands for the Israelites, `above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony' (Ex. 25:22), and the LORD was later described as the one `enthroned between the cherubim' (e.g. 1 Sa. 4:4; 2 Sa. 6:2; 2 Ki. 19:15). If the ark-cover with its cherubim represented God's throne, the ark itself was regarded as the `footstool' of God's throne (e.g. Pss. 99:5; 132:7-8; 1 Ch. 28:2). Thus God's presence and God's rule were jointly expressed by the placing of these objects in the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle, which was symbolically the throne-room of God in the midst of his people.

The tabernacle was intended to provide a portable expression
of God's presence with his people, to be located at the very centre of Israel's life on the march from Sinai to the promised land (cf. Ex. 40:36-38; Nu. 2). The covenant relationship graciously established by God contained at its heart the assurance that he would be their God and they would be his people (e.g. Gn. 17:7-8; Ex. 6:7). Consequently, he would be uniquely with them, to fulfil his purposes and bring blessing to them (e.g. Gn. 28:13-15; Ex. 3:7-8). This truth was to be symbolically represented after Sinai in the cultic provisions for Israel's relationship to God. As with the ark, which was its central feature, the tabernacle was to be, at the same time, the visible representation within Israel of God's presence and God's rule over his people. God's presence in Israel was kingly (Ex. 19:5-6, cf. 15:18) and Israel's responsibility was to recognize that in every area of life.

The tabernacle was to stand in the centre of the camp and provide the means by which all of life was to be related to God. With its outer court, inner court, and `holy of holies' (which only the high priest could enter on the annual Day of Atonement), it represented the holiness of the God who dwelt in their midst. In concrete form it expressed the truth that human beings could not come into his presence on their own terms. The complex provisions for sacrifice in connection with the tabernacle were the cultic means for acknowledging God's kingship or the protocol by which Israel was enabled to approach the Holy One and to live in his presence.16

*Priesthood, sacrifice and God's glory*

God's glory is characteristically linked in the Bible with verbs of seeing (Ex. 16:7; 33:18; Is. 40:5), and appearing (Ex. 16:10; Dt. 5:24; Is. 60:1). Although God is regarded as being invisible, when he makes his presence known or declares himself, Old Testament writers speak of the revelation of `the glory of the LORD' (k’ｂôd א’dônay). This expression simply refers to his manifest presence.17 If, in some contexts, this is associated with phenomena such as clouds and lightning and fire, it is not to be thought that God is somehow identified with these things. They serve only to conceal the true power, majesty and magnificence of God, which would destroy anyone to whom he might reveal himself fully (cf. Ex. 24:17; 33:20-23). God conceals himself in

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order to reveal himself to his people in a limited way. The glory of the LORD, veiled in a cloud as at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-18; 24:15-18), would be manifested at the tabernacle (40:34-38), leading Israel all the way to the promised land. The association of God's glory with the tabernacle and later with the temple in Jerusalem (1 Ki. 8:10-11) indicates that the sanctuary was to be the place where God could be known and encountered.

Even though little is said in Exodus about the details of the sacrificial system and its rationale, a significant theological link is provided between the consecration of the priests, the daily burnt offerings and the promise of God to meet with his people and to speak to them through Moses at `the Tent of Meeting':

For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God (Ex. 29:42-46).

The ordinary Israelite was forbidden to enter the holy place, but could meet with God at the entrance curtain of the tabernacle. Only if the sacrificial ordinances of God were carried out according to his decrees would he manifest himself in grace, allowing his glory and his word to dwell among them, to bless them. By means of the ritual outlined earlier in Exodus 29, God consecrated a special priesthood to himself from among the Israelites to enable them to relate to him through the cult. The priests did not derive their authority and function from the community but from God, who set them apart to be his servants, attending to the maintenance of his `house'. He consecrated the sanctuary in which the priests would operate by allowing his glory to dwell there in the first place, and all this was so that he
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could continue to reveal himself to his people in his glory. In one sense, then, the priesthood was to be `a channel for the continual flow of the Word into Israel's life', for the manifestation of the glory of the LORD is intimately connected in the book of Exodus with God's speaking through Moses to his people. In making his presence known among them in this way he would be fulfilling his covenant promise to be `their God' and his purpose in saving them `out of Egypt'.

God's name and God's presence

Exodus 24 has been described as the `ideal end' to the Sinai narrative sequence begun in chapter 19. However, the real conclusion is in Exodus 32 – 34, where there is rebellion in the incident with the golden calf and Moses must plead to God for mercy in the face of his threat to abandon Israel. These chapters give special insight into the way a sinful and stubborn people may continue to relate to God in his holiness. With the making of the calf-idol the Israelites were apparently concerned to provide their own means of securing the presence of the LORD (32:1-6). This is a pagan notion, which is offensive from an Old Testament point of view, because the living and true God cannot be manipulated by his creatures in any way.

As part of the judgment following this incident, the LORD promised to go ahead of Israel in the person of his angel (32:34), but not now to be especially present among them, in case their sinfulness might provoke him to act in terrible wrath against them (33:1-6; cf. 32:27-35). God promised Moses that his presence (pānîm, `face') would go with him as intercessor and mediator and give him rest (note the singular pronoun in 33:14). But Moses asked the LORD for his presence to continue with Israel, as a mark of their distinctiveness amongst the nations and this request was granted as a special favour to Moses (33:15-17). He then appealed for a confirmation of God's presence by asking to see a fuller revelation of God's glory (33:18). This request was answered with the promise of another theophany in which the LORD would proclaim his name, parade his goodness before Moses, and reveal his graciousness (33:19-23). Even Moses could not see God's `face' but God's glory would pass by him and he would see God's `back'. The promised theophany took
place (34:1-9), but with the clear implication that the true glory of God could not be penetrated even by Moses. Yet God was pleased to reveal himself in words, which could be understood and acknowledged by all his people.

God's extraordinary mercy and grace was expressed in the continuation of his covenant commitment, despite their rebellion. These truths are expressed in a propositional form, when the LORD proclaims his `name' (Ex. 34:6-7), suggesting that Israel could only know God and proclaim his character themselves because of the LORD'S initiative (cf 3:1-15; 6:1-8). God confronted his people through the proclamation of his name, which is another way of describing his self-revelation. In this way, he manifested something more of his glory amongst them, specifically in allowing all his `goodness' to be displayed before Moses (33:19). In view of Israel's rebellion, there was a concentration on God's mercy and grace at this critical moment in the nation's history, though clearly not without recognition of his terrible wrath against sin. Then, as the covenant was renewed, there was an exposition of certain cultic regulations particularly relevant to the maintenance of an exclusive relationship with the God of the covenant (34:10-28).

Exodus 34 concludes with a further play on the word pânîm ('face') as the assertion is made that now the Israelites may see the glory of God to some extent reflected in the face of Moses the mediator (vv. 29-35). Israel's access to God was strictly limited by God's design and this would be further expressed in the whole pattern of cultic regulations to be presented in the rest of the Pentateuch. Again and again, the Old Testament makes the point that the Holy One can be approached only in the way that he himself stipulates and makes possible.

In the final analysis, Exodus 32 – 34 indicates that `Moses was to the people what they wanted the calf to be – a leader and mediator of the divine presence'. This teaching has profound implications for Israel's service to God, for it ultimately means that the law, which has its origin in the revelation given to Moses at Sinai, is the source of the true knowledge of God and therefore of the worship which is acceptable to God. God `presences' himself through his word' (cf. Dt. 4:12, 15).

In this connection, it is significant to recall the role that
proclamation of God's character and God's deeds played in the Old Testament, when the people of God met together to renew the covenant and to express their relationship with God (e.g. Jos. 8:30-35; 24:1-27; Ne. 8-9). Furthermore, the work of teaching God's precepts, which was originally central to the work of the priests and therefore was focused on the sanctuary in Israel (cf. Dt. 17:9-11; 33:8-11), preserved the notion that revelation and holy place belong together.24 Within this framework of thought, with Moses mediating the glory of God, the tabernacle was still to operate as a means by which God's presence amongst his people and his rule over them was dramatically expressed. This is emphasized by the way Exodus concludes with the building of the tabernacle and the account of the coming of God's glory to fill the tent and to remain with Israel during all their travels (40:34-38).

Worship and the sacrificial system

Sacrifice today is often understood in a wholly secular sense to mean renouncing something valuable so that something even more valuable may be obtained. So, for example, many parents make `sacrifices' of time and money to pay for the education of their children. In common parlance this may have little or nothing to do with God! In the ancient world, however, sacrifice usually involved setting something apart from common usage for the benefit of the gods. Many different forms of sacrifice were used in antiquity, a variety of interpretations being offered to explain their significance. In paganism, all the important processes in the world were thought to be activated by the gods and different gods were regarded as being responsible for particular functions and spheres of life. The object of religion was to secure the goodwill of the gods by faithfully carrying out the prescribed ritual. This was necessary in order to benefit individuals, families, cities and the wider community, or to prevent some disaster from occurring.25 Yet, however much Israel may have shared the ideas and practices of other ancient religions, the meanings attached to its rituals were often very different.
Sacred festivals

A significant feature of paganism was the extent to which it was concerned to relate human life to the processes of nature. Israel too had its nature festivals, acknowledging the hand of God in the cycle of the seasons and the fruitfulness of the earth, celebrating his goodness with sacrifices and feasting. Thus, the Passover, followed by the seven days of unleavened bread, was connected with the barley harvest (Ex. 12:6; Lv. 23:5-8; Nu. 28:16-25; Dt. 16:1-8); Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, celebrated the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:26; Lv. 23:10-14; Nu. 28:26-31); and Tabernacles (Booths) was at the same time the Feast of Ingathering, the general harvest festival (Ex. 23:16; Lv. 23:33-36; Dt. 16:13-15).

The spiritual leaders of the nation had a constant struggle to preserve the distinctiveness of Israel's worship from the influences of Canaanite religion. With its orgiastic practices and presumption that the processes of nature could actually be controlled by human rituals, Baalism represented a powerful and attractive alternative to many in Israel. The unique character of Israel's worship, however, is demonstrated not only by what it rejected but also by what it added or affirmed. Thus, the agricultural festivals were all related to the great acts of God by which he brought Israel to himself and to the ordering of life in relation to his covenant. Regularly it was affirmed that the God of creation is the Lord who had revealed himself uniquely to Israel in the saving events of her history.

The Sabbath, which was meant to be a sign of the special relationship between God and Israel (Ex. 31:13-17), was not only a weekly cultic celebration, but was also celebrated as a sabbatical year or year of rest for the land every seventh year (Lv. 25:1-7). The fact that the year was marked by a whole series of festivals is a reminder of the extent to which celebration, praise, and thanksgiving were at the heart of Israelite religion. It would thus be wrong to think of people in Old Testament times being wholly occupied with the business of atonement for sins and to regard their worship as a sombre and dreary necessity. The Psalms especially testify to the joy of the pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem and the longing of the godly to meet with God and
his people in the courts of his temple (e.g. Pss. 122; 42; 43; 48; 118:19-29).

Clearly the praise of God was not confined to the cult, though many psalms may allude to cultic events (e.g. Pss. 5:7; 26:6; 42:4; 68:24-27; 122:1), and praise was a vital aspect of the assembly of God's people (e.g. Pss. 22:22-25; 26:6-7; 95:1-7; 122:4; 149:1-4; 150). While some psalms tell of specific acts of God, others praise him more generally for what he is like or what he consistently does in nature or in human history. The praise of God belonged to the whole life of God's people, just as it belonged to the whole life of the individual.

*The pattern of sacrifice in Israel*

Although the rituals of the Old Testament may have been a highly effective means of communication between God and his people in biblical times, it is not always easy to recover their original meaning. Many are only briefly explained in the Bible, some not at all, so that modern commentators often come up with very different interpretations. Within the compass of this chapter, it is not possible to enter into the scholarly debate about the development of Israel's sacrificial system and the meaning of its constituent parts. Some brief observations, however, will be made about the way the sacrificial system is presented within the structure and theology of the book of Leviticus. Here, the regulations are given as a continuation of the revelation of God to Moses at Mount Sinai (Lv. 1:1; cf. 27:34), and therefore as a provision for Israel seeking to live out its role as `a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:6).

Leviticus presents only a selection of material from Israel's cult and focuses on sacrifice as it was institutionalized at the tabernacle and the temple. Many of the details may seem irrelevant to Christian readers, but later chapters will show how a knowledge of such matters gives a better understanding of key passages in the New Testament. The sacrifices are first described in Leviticus in this order: burnt offering (1:3-17), associated cereal offerings (2:1-16), peace offerings (3:1-17), sin offering (4:1 – 5:13) and guilt offering (5:14 – 6:7).

The `holocaust', or whole-burnt offering of an animal or bird, was totally given up to God, making atonement for the offerer
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1:4) and apparently expressing at the same time complete consecration to God.\textsuperscript{30} It was regularly accompanied by the cereal grain offering, which was partly burned on the altar and partly eaten by the priests. According to Exodus 29:38-41 and Numbers 28:1-8, a whole burnt offering was to be sacrificed every morning and every evening at the LORD'S sanctuary, as a community offering. The fellowship or peace offering, which involved burning certain parts of an animal for God, and sharing the remainder in a meal, apparently symbolized the 'peace' between the LORD and his covenant people.\textsuperscript{31} Three different types of peace offering are described in Leviticus 7:11-36.

The sin offering and the guilt offering reflected the particular concern in Israelite law for dealing with transgression and its consequences, to maintain the covenant relationship who sinned 'unintentionally' (4:20, 26, 31, 34; 5:16, 18). On the other hand, it should be noted that Leviticus 6:1-7 also offers the possibility of atonement for those who sinned deliberately.\textsuperscript{33} Confession of sin is mentioned in connection with both rites (Lv. 1:5-6; Nu. 5:6-8; cf. Lv. 16:21), suggesting that the ritual act had no meaning apart from genuine repentance. Indeed, to the

With the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood 8:1-36), the system was actually inaugurated. A sin offering and a burnt offering were made for Aaron and the priesthood 9:7-14), followed by a sin offering and a burnt offering for the people (9:15-17) and then a peace offering (9:18-21). This appears to be the order whenever the actual operation of the system is in view and suggests a way of understanding the religious significance of these interlocking sacrifices, within the ritual sequence.\textsuperscript{35} Emphasis was first placed on sin which needed to be forgiven, to heal any breach of relationship with God. This was followed by an expression of personal consecration in the burnt offering, with its accompanying cereal and drink offerings in many instances. Thus, finally, the peace offering could symbolize the restoration of communion or fellowship with God and with others in the community of his people. Purification and purity were clearly the prerequisites for living in God's presence.
People offering a sacrificial animal would sometimes perform the slaughtering themselves. In many contexts they were required to lay a hand on the head of the victim (Lv. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24; cf. 16:21), suggesting not simply identification or ownership, but that the victim was 'a vicarious substitution for the donor himself', or that the worshipper's sins were symbolically transferred to the animal. After the presentation of the victim to the priests, all the activities involved in the actual execution of the offering on the altar were the concern of the priests alone. In the case of the peace offering, the people would share in consuming the meat of the offering with the priests, but otherwise their only responsibility would be to honour the priests with their allotted portions of the sacrifice. At least some of the ritual acts were accompanied by the recital of liturgical texts, explaining the meaning of the ceremony (e.g. Dt. 26:1-11).38

Cleansing and sanctification

A great concern in the levitical law is to distinguish between 'the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean' (Lv. 10:10). Everything that is not holy is common, but common things can be either clean or unclean. Animals are divided into clean and unclean categories (Lv. 11) and various physical conditions are said to make people unclean (Lv. 12 – 15). Cleanness seems to represent normality, so that 'holiness and uncleanness are variations from the norm of cleanness'. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified, but unclean objects can never be sanctified. On the other hand, clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted, and even holy items may be defiled and become common, or polluted, and therefore unclean. Holiness characterizes God himself and all that belongs to him, and so he desires that his people should consecrate themselves to him and remain holy (cf. Lv. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26). The LORD had brought Israel into a special relationship with himself, setting them apart from the nations to be his own, and this truth was to be expressed in the cultic, as well as in the moral, realm (note the mix of cultic and moral laws in Lv. 18 – 27). Pollution and sin were to be avoided in every aspect of life, to maintain this consecrated status.

Sacrificial blood is regularly associated with cleansing and
sanctification in Leviticus (e.g. 4:5-7; 7:2; 8:11-15, 23-30; 14:6–16). Blood was part of the atonement process in most Israelite sacrifices and a unifying feature of the cult. The sacrificial system reached its climax in the annual day of atonement ritual, when each part of the tabernacle was smeared with blood (Lv. 16:14-16, 18-19), to cleanse it from the effect of the nation's sin. In a very real sense, people and sanctuary were identified in this ancient ritual. The aim was to purify and consecrate both sanctuary and people, making it possible for Israel to draw near to God through the cult and for God to continue to dwell amongst his people. Although in other religions blood was regarded as a source of life-power and was used for healing, for magic and sorcery, or for feeding the spirits, nothing has so far been found that parallels, in any significant way, the treatment of blood in Israel.40

The Israelites were expressly forbidden to consume blood, even in the course of eating meat, because God had designated it:0 be used exclusively for making atonement by means of

-o you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the hood that makes atonement for one's life' (Lv. 17:10-11, cf. Gn. 9:4: Lv. 3:17; 7:26; Dt. 12:16, 23; 15:23). The verb translated here

polluted object. In non-sacrificial contexts it can also mean `to a ransom' (cf. Ex. 21:30), so that a guilty person does not suffer the death penalty demanded by God's holiness in particular situations. It seems best to understand the verb in the latter sense in Leviticus 17:11.41 The life of an animal, represented by it's blood splashed over the altar, is the ransom price for the life of the worshipper: the blood ransoms at the price of a life. Animal blood atones for human sin, not because of some magical quality or life-power in it but simply because God chose and prescribed it for this purpose ("I have given it to you to make atonement").

Although there is a constant concern in the Mosaic law for the proper conduct of sacrifices, it is clear that mere performance of a rite does not make it effective. God promised atonement and forgiveness through the sacrificial system (e.g. Lv. 1:4; 4:20, 26,
31, 35), but not simply as the direct physical effect of the rites performed. Cleansing was his gracious gift to those who obeyed his word, seeking his forgiveness in repentance and faith.\footnote{42} Indeed, many of the prophets and psalmists highlighted the failure of Israel to engage with God appropriately by means of the cult, and sought to throw the people more directly upon the divine mercy that lay behind its provisions.

**Worship and the Jerusalem temple**

Both the ark and the tabernacle were more important in early Israel than any other cult object, and the sanctuary where they were located became inevitably `the foremost sanctuary of Yahweh, and the centre of Israelite federation'.\footnote{43} When the \textsc{Lord} anointed David as king over Israel and blessed David's attempts to bring the ark into Jerusalem, the implication was that he was adopting David's city as his sanctuary – the new centre of Israel's life and worship (2 Sa. 6). The link between Jerusalem, or more specifically Mount Zion, as the city of God and the choice of David and his dynasty to be rulers of Israel is clearly made in 2 Samuel 5 – 7 (cf. Pss. 78:68-71; 132:11-14).

*The temple and God's purpose for Israel*

Although David's suggestion of building a permanent `house' for God first met with a positive response from Nathan the prophet (2 Sa. 7:3), the \textsc{Lord} then indicated that he would take the initiative himself in the whole enterprise and the temple would be built at the time and in the manner of his choosing (2 Sa. 7:4-16).\footnote{44} It is important to note that there is a play on the word `house' in this passage. The \textsc{Lord} would establish the rule of David's `house' over Israel and then David's son would build a `house' for God.\footnote{45} This suggests that the temple was not to be viewed as an automatic consequence of David's political success: it could not simply be understood as a divine endorsement of the king's authority, as was customary in the ancient world. In fact, as the following chapters show, the conquest of Canaan was not yet complete: `rest' had been given to David (2 Sa. 7:1), and yet
there was a `rest' still to be established (7:11). Only when the promises of the Abrahamic covenant had been fulfilled by God's sovereign action (7:8-11), and David's dynasty had been established as God had decreed (7:12-16), could his son be the temple builder. In this way the temple would more obviously function as the expression of God's kingship in Israel.

The building of the temple in Jerusalem and its subsequent history is a central concern of 1 and 2 Kings. The fulfilment of the `rest' promised in 2 Samuel 7:10-11 is proclaimed in 1 Kings 5:3-4 (cf. 8:56), as a preliminary to the description of the temple in the following chapters (1 Ki. 6 – 7). The notion that God's promise to David had been fulfilled, and thereby all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses', is declared when the seven-year building project is completed (1 Ki. 8:14-21, 56-61). Apart from obvious differences in size and

, the design of the temple reflected to a large extent the pattern provided for the tabernacle in Exodus 25 – 27. Like the tabernacle, the temple was to represent God's rule over Israel and to be a reminder of his special presence among them, to bless them and make them a source of blessing to the nations.

The temple as God's earthly `dwelling-place'

The notion that the exodus traditions were now to be centred on the Jerusalem temple was made very clear at the dedication ceremony (1 Ki. 8:1-21). The ark of the covenant and the tabernacle with all its sacred furnishings were brought in procession to the temple. Then, in language reflecting the tradition about the tabernacle, `When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple' (vv. 10-11; cf. Ex. 40: 34-35). This theophany was recognized by Solomon as a sign that the LORD had deigned to make the temple his special dwelling and there to reveal his glory, even though his glory was shrouded `in a dark cloud' as on Sinai (v. 12). The temple's function as the place where God could be encountered as stressed again by his appearance to Solomon with this assurance:
I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there for ever. My eyes and my heart will always be there (1 Ki. 9:3).

Many scholars take the statement that God put his name there or that Solomon built the temple `for the name of the LORD his God' (1 Ki. 5:3, cf. 3:2; 5:3-5; 8:44, 48; cf. 2 Sa. 7:13) as evidence of a later theological corrective. It was easy for people to make an idol of the temple and to limit God, imagining that the temple was his actual dwelling-place, his palace and his throne. It has been shown, however, that the biblical concept of God putting his name there has parallels in other ancient literature and that it fundamentally means that God is the owner of the sanctuary. This expression does not imply that God was regarded as being remote from the temple, `for his name, like his face, denotes his presence, and both are extensions of Yahweh's personality'.

The promise that God's `eyes' and his `heart' would always be there (1 Ki. 9:3) was a graphic way of affirming that the temple was God's earthly dwelling-place (1 Ki. 8:13; cf. Pss. 26:8; 27:4; 43:3-4; 48:1-3; 132:6-9, 13-14). Solomon's dedication prayer questions whether God can really dwell on earth and affirms that `the heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!' (8:27). Nevertheless, Solomon was conscious of praying there in God's presence (8:28, Hebrew, יִפְנֹאֵם תּוֹךְ, literally `before your face').

The balance between such affirmations of God's presence and the acknowledgment that he cannot be confined to an earthly temple is maintained throughout the dedication prayer with the repeated insistence that, when prayers are directed towards this place, God will answer from heaven, his dwelling-place (8:30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49). Solomon focused on the temple's function as a place of prayer because the temple was a sign of God's presence and his kingly rule over Israel and the whole created order.

The temple signified that there was a future for Israel as the people of God because the building itself expressed the continuance of God's covenant promise to be with them and bless them
(8:56-61). Even when national sin might reach its ultimate end in exile, prayer directed to the place where God had set his name would bring restoration and forgiveness (8:46-51).

Worship and the future of God's people

Prophetic criticisms of sacrifice and the temple

It was once fashionable to treat the Jewish prophets as essentially critics, even opponents of the cult, and to view them as the only source of everything that was praiseworthy in the faith of Israel. However, modern scholarship sees a much closer link between prophets and priests in the service of God and the temple. There are certainly numerous passages in the writing of the prophets condemning priests and people for their corruption of the sacrificial system (e.g. Am. 4:4-13; Ho. 8:11-13; Je. 7:21-26; Ezk. 16:15-21; 20:25-31). These deal with the introduction of pagan ideas and practices into Israelite worship, or the attempt to worship other gods whilst still claiming to serve the LORD, or the hypocrisy of engaging in the sacrificial ritual without genuine repentance and a desire to live in obedience to God's moral law.

Sometimes, in order to clarify the sort of response the cult was meant to inculcate in God's people, prophecies are worded in a way that appears to be a categorical rejection of the cult (e.g. Am. 5:21-27; Ho. 6:6; Is. 1:10-17; 66:1-4; Mi. 6:6-8). However, such passages are condemnations of Israel's abuse of the cult rather than of the cult itself. Moreover, there are texts which speak with approval of future sacrificial activity, portraying a time when God would renew his people and their worship (e.g. Is. 19:19-21; 56:6-7; 60:7; Je. 17:24-27; 33:10-11, 17-18; Ezk. 20:40-41). In other words, it is not correct to say that the prophets condemned sacrifice absolutely or that they envisaged the survival of Israel apart from the provision of some form of sacrifice.

It is interesting to note that certain psalms reflect prophetic perspectives. Four almost reach the level of condemning sacrifice (e.g. Pss. 40, 50, 51, 69). Yet their intention seems to be to give
expression to the true meaning implicit in the sacrificial rituals, insisting that prayer and praise, repentance, confession and obedience, are the essential requirements of God. Worshippers are asked to admit that they cannot give God anything to satisfy his needs and yet he is to be honoured by every expression of faith, gratitude and obedience. What is required of those who would come into God's presence is purity of heart and life (e.g. Pss. 15; 24; 119).

Although the prophets could argue that the LORD'S presence with his people in his sanctuary on Mount Zion meant that he would defend them against their enemies and bless them (e.g. Is. 8:9-10; 31:4-5; 37:33-35), they made it clear that God's protection was not to be regarded as unconditional (e.g. Is. 29:1-4; Je. 7:1-15). If Israel remained disobedient to the covenant and neglectful of the worship that was truly honouring to him, terrible judgment would come from the hand of the LORD himself (e.g. Is. 1; Mic. 3). If his holiness continued to be desecrated by their corrupt practices, then the temple would have to be destroyed (e.g. Je. 7:1-15; Ezk. 7-9).

1 and 2 Kings show how the function of the temple was corrupted and diminished, first by the division of the kingdom and then progressively by the faithlessness of leaders and people. When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonian invaders in 587 BC, and many Jews were taken captive to Babylon (cf. 2 Ki. 25), this was seen by the prophets as the inevitable result of the continuing rejection of God's rule by his people. Ezekiel insisted that the loss of the temple meant the departure of God's glory and, with the loss of his presence, the removal of his protection and blessing (e.g. Ezk. 9:3; 10:4-5; 11:23; yet note 11:16).

Sacrifice and temple in the prophetic hope

Undoubtedly the preaching of the prophets also enabled Israel to survive this test of faith. They proclaimed that God was acting in judgment but that in due time he would act in forgiveness and restoration, allowing a remnant to return to their homeland (Is. 40:1-11; Je. 31:31-34; Ezk. 20:39-44). Some indicated that the temple would be restored and become the spiritual centre not only of Israel but also a focal point for the nations:
In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be rased above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,
`Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.'
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
(Is. 2:2-3; 44:28; cf. Mi. 4:1-3; Je. 3:17-18)

The coming of the nations, with all their offerings to God,
would be the means by which he would adorn his glorious house
in the coming age and glorify himself in their midst (Is. 60).
Ezekiel's prophecy of the restoration actually included a plan for
a new temple (Ezk. 40 – 48). `Just as the building of the taber-
nacle completed the Exodus and was its logical conclusion,
eschatology is dominated here by the construction of the new
temple. Just as the meaning of the Exodus was proclaimed in the
cultic" response of Israel to divine kingship, so here the new
temple will function as Yahweh's kingly setting in the new holy
city.'50 The purifying and sanctifying influence of the new temple
upon the land would restore it to a paradise situation for God's
people (47:1-12; cf. Ps. 36:7-9), for God himself would be there
(cf. 48:35). Although these chapters reflect something of the
original exodus structure and its theology, they indicate that
God is going to do something totally new in the outworking of his
purposes. This temple-plan, with all its marvellous symbolism,
combines a number of biblical ideals and points to their ultimate
fulfilment, not by some human building programme, but by the
sovereign and gracious act of God (cf. 20:40-44).

The rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian Exile in 515
BC apparently left many with a sense of anticlimax. Instead of
being the glorious centre of worship for the nations, Israel
was again subjected to a long period of pagan domination, culminating in the Roman occupation just before the New Testament era began. Consequently, the post-exilic prophets pointed to the fulfilment of the hopes associated with the temple and the renewal of its worship in a time that was yet to come.51

The idea that a glorious temple would have to be built for a new age persisted in some of the literature of the inter-testamental period (e.g. Tobit 14:5; Jubilees 1:15-17, 26-29; cf 25:21; 11QTemple 29:8-10). To this new centre of worship, Jews who were still in exile would return and the Gentiles would come to praise God (e.g. Tobit 13:5, 11). 52 In some documents, the restoration of right worship is viewed as the work of the Messiah (e.g. in the so-called Psalms of Solomon). Other traditions express the view that God himself must cause his heavenly temple to appear on earth, to replace the corrupted earthly institution (e.g. 1 Enoch). The Jewish sect which settled at Qumran set themselves up as the true Israel, `in the hope of creating a new spiritual centre to replace the desecrated temple until the day when God would finally reveal himself and confirm Israel's victory'. 53 As such, they considered themselves the true temple, `a sanctuary in Aaron' and 'a house of truth in Israel' (I QS 5:6). These various expectations form an important background for understanding what the New Testament says about the replacement of the temple in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Decisive for understanding the Old Testament view of worship is the idea that the God of heaven and earth had taken the initiative in making himself known, first to the patriarchs of Israel and then, through the events of the exodus from Egypt and the encounter on Mount Sinai, to the nation as a whole. The book of Exodus proclaims that God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt so that they might serve or worship him exclusively. They were redeemed in order to engage with God, initially at `the mountain of God', then in the wilderness wanderings, and finally in the land which was to be his gift to them. The ark and the
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tabernacle were to function as an expression of God's continuing presence with them and his rule over them. The transfer of the ark to Jerusalem and the subsequent building of the temple marked God's choice of Zion as the mountain where he could be known and where his glory would be manifested in the midst of his people. The exodus traditions were thus attached to the city of David and the rule of God was to be expressed through the temple and the Davidic kingship.

The whole system of worship associated with these powerful symbols – the ark, the tabernacle and the temple – was designed to be a means of acknowledging and living in relation to God's royal and holy presence. Obedience to God in cultic observance was to go hand in hand with obedience in matters of everyday life. In one sense, the worship of this 'kingdom of priests' and 'holy nation' could be defined as a faithful observance of all the ordinances of God, in grateful recognition of his mercies towards them. Within this covenant framework, the sacrificial system was the means by which God made it possible for a sinful people to draw near to him, to receive his grace and blessing, without desecrating his holiness and so incurring his wrath against them. By God's provision through the cult the covenant relationship could be maintained.

The failure of Israel to engage with God in the way that he required – in the cult and in everyday life – culminated in the terrible judgment of exile. Yet, the prophetic hope for the restoration of Israel and the blessing of the nations was intimately connected with a vision of renewed worship in a restored temple. By this means God would bring the nations to acknowledge his kingly rule and to be united in his service. The implications of this hope for a Christian theology of worship will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Notes
A classic example of a sanctuary legend in New Testament times is mentioned in Acts 19:35. The great temple of the goddess Artemis at Ephesus in Asia Minor, which in its later form ranked as one of the seven wonders of the world, housed the image of the goddess. The legend that this image, or perhaps a meteorite resembling it, had 'fallen from heaven' was apparently the basis on