

## **Worship in the New Testament (Following Hebrew Bible Maps) <sup>1</sup>**

by [Paul Sumner](#)

Modern Messianic Judaism parallels the return of the Jewish people to Palestine. Like early *halutzim*, Messianic believers (both Jewish and Gentile) are returning to the homeland of biblical faith to reverse centuries of neglect, remove accumulated alien debris and rebuild a viable community on ancient foundations. But in many cases, Messianics are resurveying and rebuilding the Land using two maps: Rabbinic and Christian.

The problem is that both maps were composed in the Diaspora under the influence of defensive evolving orthodoxy. Though neither map is totally useless (one could find the Kotel or Kinneret), they contain sectarian holy sites enshrining pious traditions not based on archeological fact. And these sites determine the patterns of travel for most pilgrim visitors. Because Messianics have long been engaged in basic survival (like the pioneers of Palestine), they often try out of convenience to merge the two maps. Specifically, they try to combine unitarian forms with trinitarian faith; they recite the Shema with a Nicean understanding. But they haven't seriously questioned whether such harmonizing of the two Diaspora orthodoxies is biblically valid.

### **Why a New Map is Needed**

Resurveying the Land afresh and drawing an accurate, complete map is necessary. The justification for this is that the Rabbinic and Christian maps do not depict the whole landscape, the full reality of Scripture. Messianics are well aware that Rabbinic, Maimonidean unitarianism is incompatible with retaining a biblical faith in Yeshua. <sup>2</sup> They tend to be less aware that the trinitarian grid-map contains contradictory features.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article appeared in *Mishkan* journal (Jerusalem), Vol. 25 (No. 2, 1996): 5–15. This version is from May 6, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The *Thirteen Principles* of Maimonides [1135–1204] are actually articles of faith, a creed of essential Jewish beliefs. The Second Principle states: “I believe with perfect faith that the Creator,

One can simply look at the larger Church to discern that the trinity doctrine has not solved the “mystery” of God but has produced chaos. Though most Christians officially define themselves in terms of “historic Christian orthodoxy,” they are not of one mind in their operative concepts about God. In church services today some Christians worship God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ his Son; others worship the Triune God or individual members of the Holy Trinity; some worship Jesus as Jehovah-God or as Yahweh; others worship the Holy Spirit as Lord and Life-giver. Then some also pray to saints, angels, the Mother of God, or to God the Mother.

These Christians all profess allegiance to the same orthodox trinitarian map, yet obviously it has not led them to the same understanding of God. Why? I believe it fosters navigational distortion because it is based on speculative reasoning about the imagined but impenetrable subsurface of God’s being and not on the actual topography of Scripture. People lose their bearings using a map of theoretical, speculative reality. And though strongly warned that they must yield to the Mystery hidden in the map, many become confused when the Map rarely corresponds to biblical topography and landmarks.

A good map depicts what you encounter when you travel the land; it provides precise orientation to those who are lost. The New Testament is God’s map of “Messianic” spiritual reality. Too often, though, Gentile Christians and Messianic believers read the NT with trinitarian grid-lines superimposed and frequently miss the Scripture’s distinctive contours.

I propose we resurvey the whole NT landscape and draw a new map. Instead of starting with traditional proof-texts as survey markers, I suggest we look at a whole other set of coordinates to get a bigger, better picture. These become visible when we examine the subject of worship.

Worship is a reflection of theology. How people worship reveals how they perceive God.

Drawing a map of *New Testament worship* is the purpose of this paper. It is not concerned with the hows, but with the content and particularly the *objects* of worship. To *whom* did the first century Jewish believers actually pray and on whom did they focus their attention?

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blessed be his Name, is a Unity [יְחִידוּת? *yechidut*], and that there is no Unity in any manner like unto his.” The term *yechidut* is not biblical, though its root *yachid* (יָחִיד, unique, only one) is. Rambam may have employed it here to counter medieval Roman Catholic exegesis on the word *echad* in the Shema (Deut 6:4), which was used to prove the doctrine of “composite triunity.”

## Vocabulary About God

Prerequisite to a study of worship is the need to review the NT's use of the words "God" and "Lord." Several biblical specialists have reminded us that these two words have distinct applications. In fact, NT writers use these terms primarily to distinguish between the Father and the Son.<sup>3</sup>

### God

The term "God" (θεός *theos*) almost always refers to the Father. He is the "one God" (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5), the "only God" (John 5:44; Rom 16:27; 1 Tim 1:17), and the "God of our Lord Yeshua Messiah" (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3, 17; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). He is Yeshua's "head" (1 Cor 11:3) and Yeshua "belongs to" him (1 Cor 3:23). The Father is Yeshua's "God" (John 20:17; Rev 3:12).

On the other hand, Yeshua is called "God" unambiguously in only two passages (John 1:1; 20:28). Yet both these texts have safeguards to prevent confusion that Yeshua is God the Father.<sup>4</sup> In other verses where the Son appears to be called God, the Greek textual witness shows signs of tampering by dogma-driven scribes (John 1:18; 1 Tim 3:16).<sup>5</sup> In some verses, the punctuation or grammatical construction of

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<sup>3</sup> "The characteristic New Testament idiom is that God is the Father and the title 'Lord' is almost completely confined to Jesus" (Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philipppians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967], 275. "[The term 'Lord'] is not only a way of *identifying* Jesus with God but also of distinguishing Jesus from God" (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* [Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1988], 841). "Gentile Christians . . . reserved *theos* regularly for God the Father and *kyrios* regularly for Jesus" (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983], 51).

<sup>4</sup> While John 1:1c reads "the Word was God" [*theos en ho logos*] the previous phrase reads: "the Word was with God" [*ho logos en pros ton theon*] signifying distinction between them. Yeshua often says he came "from beside" (*para*) God, the Father (John 6:46; 7:29; 17:5).

John 20:28 contains Thomas's exclamation when he saw the resurrected Lord: "My Lord and my God." In v. 31, however, John concludes this scene by telling readers he wrote his gospel "that you may believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God"—the emphasis found throughout John's account. Cf. John 14:1—"You believe in God, believe also in me"; John 17:3—"This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Yeshua Messiah whom you have sent."

<sup>5</sup> At John 1:18 most modern translations follow the Alexandrian text reading: "the only (or unique) *God*." The Byzantine or Majority Text has: "the only (or unique) *Son*." The venerable and conservative lexicographer Joseph Henry Thayer wrote under his entry on *monogenes*: "[The reading *monogenes theos*] is foreign to John's mode of thought and speech (iii.16, 18; 1 Jn. iv.9), dissonant and harsh,—appears to owe its origin to a dogmatic zeal which broke out soon after the early days of the church" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.* [1885], 418). For discussion about which reading is more

Greek phrases make the attestations of deity ambiguous (Rom 9:5; Tit 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 Jn 5:20; see translations and commentaries). In any case, it is rare, if it occurs at all, that Yeshua is referred to as “God” outright, without qualification.

### Lord

The word “Lord” (κύριος *kurios*) is less restrictive in its use. It can refer to God the Father, and usually represents the original Hebrew Tetragrammaton יהוה.<sup>6</sup> But most often *kurios* designates Yeshua. “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord” (Luke 2:11). “God has made him both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). And confessing Yeshua as Lord—not as God—is the purpose of apostolic evangelism and the work of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Psalm 110:1 is foundational here: “The LORD [ יהוה ] said to my Lord [ אדון, Adon], ‘Sit at my right hand.’ ” This is the most often quoted passage from the Hebrew Bible in the NT. In fact, Yeshua employs it at key moments to identify himself as God’s *Adon*, the Lord sitting beside YHVH (Matt 22:43-45; 26:63-64). Not surprisingly, the apostles follow his exegetical example.<sup>8</sup>

This God-and-Lord pattern is evident everywhere.

Note the opening salutations of most every epistle (“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Yeshua Messiah”); or Paul’s “Messianic Shema”

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likely original see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: German and United Bible Societies, 1994), 169-70.

In 1 Tim 3:16, the reading “*God* was manifested in the flesh” appears first in Greek texts of the 4th century, the era of the first trinitarian councils. Whereas, “*(he) who* was manifested” is older and likely original. The difference between the two words is slight, because of the use of the *nomina sacra* or abbreviations of the sacred names in the early Greek manuscripts. The word “who” [ὅς] appears as OC, while “God” [θεός] appears as ΘC in the uncial texts. A scribe can easily insert a horizontal line in the omicron to create a theta. Nearly all NT versions today read “who” or “he who” instead of “God.” For evidence see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 573-74; idem, *The Text of the New Testament* (2d ed.; Oxford/New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 187; Kurt Aland & Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (trans. E. F. Rhodes; 2d ed.; Leiden, Holland: Brill/Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 283.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Luke 1:32, 68; 2:22; Acts 2:39; 4:26; 7:33; Rom 4:8; Rev 11:15.

<sup>7</sup> Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:9-11; cf. Acts 10:36.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20, 22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21. On the use of Psalm 110:1 in the NT, see David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1973). Hay says “the image [of the Lord next to YHVH] affirmed supreme exaltation without calling into question the glory and sovereignty of God the Father. Jesus’ elevation was thereby defined in terms of unique proximity to God, and Father and Son were carefully distinguished” (159).

in 1 Cor 8:6: “For us there is one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Yeshua Messiah.”<sup>9</sup>

In resurrection passages the wording follows the same pattern:

God raised him [Yeshua the Nazarene] up again. (Acts 2:22, 24)

If you confess with our mouth Yeshua as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9)

God raised the Lord. (1 Cor 6:14)

He who raised the Lord Yeshua will raise us also with Yeshua. (2 Cor 4:14)

This distinction between God and Lord, once perceived, allows the dominant NT worship patterns to emerge.<sup>10</sup> Words have meaning, and words convey images, and images convey theology.

The *objects* of Jewish apostolic worship can be discerned by focusing on words such as prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and blessing, and on the content of hymns. The objects also appear in descriptions of the Temple, and in visions of the heavenly throne room or of Mount Zion. A complete list of supporting texts would be quite long, so I will only cite representative examples in the various categories.

### **What Yeshua Did**

What is often overlooked in discussions of worship is Yeshua’s own habit of praying, requesting, blessing, thanking, and praising God. Passages mentioning his worship of his Father are included in this study.

## **Prayer**

The primary NT Greek verb meaning to pray is *proseuchomai*. The majority of time the apostles pray to God, as Yeshua directed them: “Pray to your Father who is in the secret place” (Matt 6:6); “Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25); “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, when we pray for you” (Col 1:3).<sup>11</sup> In two places *proseuchomai* is used for

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<sup>9</sup> Note that God’s title “Lord of lords” (*Adonei ha’adonim*, Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3) is also given to Yeshua (Rev 17:14; 19:16). But the Son never wears the Father’s unique title “God of gods” (*Elohei ha’elohim*, Deut 10:17; Ps 136:2; Dan 2:47; 11:36).

<sup>10</sup> Later theologians obscured this precise wording by creating the two phrases “God the Son” (to distinguish him from “God the Father,” a biblical phrase) and “God the Holy Spirit.”

communication with the “Lord,” probably the resurrected Messiah (Acts 1:24; 22:17-19).

Similarly, prayers (*proseuche*) are mostly offered to the Father, not Yeshua. “As I remember you in my prayers . . . I pray that the God of our Lord Yeshua Messiah will give you . . .” (Eph 1:16-17); “I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Yeshua Messiah and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Rom 15:30).<sup>12</sup>

The Gospel of Luke places strong emphasis on Yeshua’s prayer life. Luke portrays him as praying from beginning to end.

After being immersed in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended on Yeshua “while he was praying” (Luke 3:21-22). During his mission journeys he “would often slip away to the wilderness and pray” (Luke 5:16). After facing the rage of his enemies, “he went off to the mountain to pray and spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). After multiplying the bread and fish for five thousand guests, he departed and “was praying alone,” then asked the disciples whom the guests thought he was (Luke 9:18). Later, he took Peter, John, and Jacob up a mountain where, “while he was praying,” his visage was changed by the glory of God (Luke 9:28-29). Then “while he was praying in a certain place” his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, and he outlined basic principles in the “Lord’s Prayer” (Luke 11:1-4). And at the end, in the olive orchard above Kidron Valley, “he knelt down and began to pray” and in his agony “was praying very fervently” (Luke 22:41, 44).<sup>13</sup>

■ Entreaties, supplications, or earnest requests (*deesis*) are addressed to God. “My prayer to God . . . is for their salvation” (Rom 10:1).<sup>14</sup> Requests involving other verbs are also usually directed to God (*euchomai*, 2 Cor 13:7; *aiteo*, Jacob 1:5; *aiteo*, 1 Jn 5:16), with some requests made of Yeshua (*aiteo*, John 14:13-14; *parakaleo*, 2 Cor 12:8). At times, praying simply means raising the voice to heaven, as when the apostles “lifted their voices in one accord to God,” asking for his protection and healing power through his “holy servant Yeshua” (Acts 4:24-30).

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<sup>11</sup> See also 1 Cor 11:13; 2 Cor 13:7; Col 4:3; 2 Thess 1:11.

<sup>12</sup> See also Acts 10:4; 12:5; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 1 Tim 5:5; Phile 4; Rev 8:4.

<sup>13</sup> Other passages mentioning Yeshua’s prayers: Matt 14:23; 19:13; Mk 1:35; 6:46; 14:32, 35, 39; John 11:41-42 and chapter 17 (the longest recorded prayer in the NT).

<sup>14</sup> See also Phil 4:6; 1 Tim 2:1, 3; 2 Tim 1:3. Note the related verb *deomai*, ask or implore (Acts 4:30-31; Rom 1:9-10).

When Yeshua was in the Gethsemane orchard, “he offered up *entreaties* [*deesis*] and supplications [*bikteria*] with loud crying and tears” (Heb 5:7). He also “prayed” (*deomai*) for Simon Peter not to fall to the Satan (Luke 22:32).

■ The NT reports people “calling upon” or “invoking” (*epikaleo*) the name of Yeshua as Lord. Invoking him means calling for his presence and assistance, as when Stephen “called upon [Yeshua]” while being executed (Acts 7:59).<sup>15</sup> Jew and Gentile alike are invited to call upon their one Lord Yeshua (Rom 10:12-14). The verb *epikaleo* is also used for calling on God (Acts 2:21; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Pet 1:17). Invoking “the Lord” is an idiom from the Hebrew Bible, where the phrase **בשם יהוה קרא** (*qara beshem YHVH*) signifies either prayer or worship (Gen 13:4; Isa 64:6; Ps 116:13). In Romans 10:12-13, Paul quotes a passage from Joel 3:5 (Heb, LXX; Eng 2:32) that speaks of calling upon YHVH, but Paul applies it to Yeshua. He frequently does this, implying not that Yeshua *is* YHVH himself, but that his lordship is the present expression of God’s sovereign reign through him.<sup>16</sup>

■ Apostolic *benedictions* are a form of prayer. These exist in two formulas: one that mentions God only; the other both God and Yeshua. (A) “Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Yeshua . . . make you complete” (Heb 13:20, 21; cf. 1 Thess 5:23). (B) “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Yeshua direct our way to you” (1 Thess 3:11); “Now may our Lord Yeshua Messiah himself and God our father . . . strengthen your hearts” (2 Thess 2:16-17).

■ Prayer directed to the Holy Spirit is unknown in the NT. People pray “*in* (the) Spirit” (Acts 7:55; Eph 6:18; Judah 20), but never “*to*” the Spirit. At no time do they say, “Come, Holy Spirit.” Most important is the example of Yeshua himself. When once “he rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit,” he said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Luke 10:21). Being in Spirit did not compel him to acknowledge the Spirit, as someone distinct from the Father. When Yeshua prays, he seeks counsel from God, not the Spirit. When he says, “I am not alone,” he points to his present companion: “the Father is with me” (John 16:32; cf. 8:16, 29). Likewise, his disciples show no evidence of inquiring of the Spirit, as though it were a voice or presence distinct from God or the resurrected Messiah. In Acts and the epistles, the Holy Spirit is also “the Spirit of Yeshua” (Acts 16:6-7) or “the Spirit of Messiah” (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11).

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<sup>15</sup> See also Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 1 Cor 1:2; Jacob 2:7.

<sup>16</sup> Matt 3:3; Rom 10:13; Heb 1:10; 1 Pet 3:15. Yeshua [whose name in Hebrew means “YHVH saves”] came in his Father’s name, i.e., his authority, character, reputation (John 5:43).

*Summary.* The dominant NT practice is that prayer is typically directed to God the Father. In the early days of apostolic evangelism, there is on-going communication with the resurrected Lord, but it never stops with him. Yeshua is not a substitute for God. He is positioned between people and God as interceding priest and beside Him as ruling prince.

## **Praise**

The primary NT expression for offering praise is “to give glory” (*doxa*). Literally, *doxa* means brightness, splendor, or radiance. Figuratively, it means fame, renown, or honor. This follows the usage in Hebrew Scripture. Psalm 24 says YHVH is the “King of glory,” and Psalm 96 commands the people to give glory (כבוד *kavod*) to him. In the NT, after any significant event or answer to prayer, the apostles want all the honor to be credited to the Father,<sup>17</sup> especially when remembering his gifts and saving actions through Yeshua:

To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. (Phil 4:20)

To the only wise God be glory forever through Yeshua Messiah!  
(Rom 16:27)

God highly exalted him . . . that every tongue should confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
(Phil 2:9, 11)

Believers also “glorify” (*doxazo*) God. “With one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah” (Rom 15:6); “So that in all things God may be glorified through Yeshua Messiah” (1 Pet 4:11b).<sup>18</sup> Three times Yeshua alone is given glory by men and angels (2 Tim 4:18b; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 5:12). In Jewish tradition, the *Kiddush* means “sanctification,” literally “to glorify or set apart” (שקדש *kadasb*).

■ The phrase “Blessed be” is a familiar expression from Hebrew and Jewish worship (ברוך *barukh*—Exod 18:10; Ezek 3:12; Ps 119:12; LXX Grk *enlogetos*). The verb ברך, *barakh*, translated “to bless,” originally meant to kneel down or adore on bended knees (Ps 95:6). In the NT, the object of every *berakhab* is God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah” (2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3).

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<sup>17</sup> See Rom 11:36; 2 Cor 4:15; Gal 1:5; 1 Tim 1:17; Judah 25.

<sup>18</sup> See also Acts 11:18; 21:20; Rom 15:9; 1 Pet 4:11, 16.

Jacob says, “We bless our Lord and Father” (Jacob 3:9). And Yeshua affirms to Caiaphas that he is indeed the “Son of the Blessed One [*he eulogetos*]” (Mark 14:61).

Every time Yeshua takes bread in hand he offers a blessing. This act follows the Jewish custom of blessing the Creator of the bread in the Kiddush: “Blessed are You, O LORD our God . . . who brings forth bread from the earth.” “He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward Heaven, he *blessed*, and broke the loaves and he kept giving them to the disciples” (Mark 6:41; cf. Matt 14:19). “While they were eating, he took some bread, and after *a blessing* he broke it and gave it to them” (Mark 14:22; cf. Matt 26:26). Some verses say he blesses the bread (or food) itself (Mark 8:7; Luke 9:16); but some Greek manuscripts simply read “he blessed.”

## Thanksgiving

“Thanks” or “thanksgiving” (*eucharisteo*) is almost always given to God. “Giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Yeshua Messiah” (Eph 5:20); “We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, when we pray for you” (Col 1:3).<sup>19</sup> Numerous times, the apostle says, “I thank my God” (Rom 1:8; Phil 1:3; Philem 4) or “Thanks be to God” (*charis*; Rom 6:17; 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 2:14).

The “Messianic Shema” in Colossians 3:17 commands: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Yeshua, *giving thanks to God the Father through him*.” Only one time is thanks offered to Yeshua directly: “I thank Messiah Yeshua, who has strengthened me” (1 Tim 1:12).

The gospels report that Yeshua often offers thanks to his Father. In fact, this is another way of “blessing” him, as in the Kiddush.<sup>20</sup> “[T]aking the seven loaves, he gave thanks and broke them” (Mark 8:6; cf. Matt 15:36; John 6:11, 23). “And having taken a cup, when he had given thanks, he said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves’ ” (Luke 22:17; cf. Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23). “And having taken some bread, when he had given thanks, he broke it” (Luke 22:19a). Standing before the tomb of Lazarus, Yeshua raises his eyes and says, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. And I knew that you always hear me” (John 11:41-42).

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<sup>19</sup> See also Acts 28:15; Rom 1:21; 14:6; 2 Cor 9:11-12; Col 1:12; 1 Thess 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13; Rev 11:17.

<sup>20</sup> The Kiddush reads in part: “Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine . . . who brings forth bread from the earth.”

## Objects of Hymns

Several commentators think we have portions of hymns or doxologies scattered throughout the New Testament letters. Of those hymns mentioning Yeshua, none is directly addressed *to* him, but are *about* him.<sup>21</sup> Instead, believers are told to direct their “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . . to God” (Col 3:16) or “to God, even the Father” (in the name of the Lord Yeshua Messiah) (Eph 5:19-20).

The book of Revelation has more variety. It contains the greatest collection of hymns in the NT. Sung in the heavenly Temple by either heavenly beings or human martyrs, these hymns are directed both to God and to “the Lamb” (the usual designation for Yeshua in this book). As with prayer and praise, most of the hymns recorded by John are addressed to God, who is typically described as the “one who sits on the throne.”

The four living creatures say:  
Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty,<sup>22</sup>  
Who was and who is and who is to come. . . .  
Worthy are you, our Lord and our God,  
To receive glory and honor and power. (Rev 4:8b, 11a)<sup>23</sup>

Hallelu Yah! For the Lord God, the Almighty, reigns. (Rev 19:6)

Only one hymn honors the Lamb alone.

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
For you were slain and by your blood did ransom men for God, . . .  
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth  
And wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.  
(Rev 5:9a, 12b)

Other hymns honor both God and the Lamb:

To Him who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb,

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<sup>21</sup> A list of NT hymns might include passages such as: John 1:1-18; Eph 1:13-14; 5:14; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; Titus 3:4-7; Heb 1:1f. The translation of Arthur Way prints many passages in verse form to highlight their hymnic nature (*The Letters of Saint Paul* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1953; orig. England, 1901]).

<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek “the Almighty” (*pantokrator*) is “LORD of hosts” (צְבָאוֹת) יהוה, *YHVH Tzeva’ot*). The LXX usually has *pantokrator* for *YHVH Tzeva’ot*.

<sup>23</sup> See also Rev 7:11-12; 11:17; 15:3; 16:5-7; 19:1, 4; 22:9.

be blessing and honor and glory  
and dominion forever and ever. (Rev 5:13)

Salvation [belongs] to our God who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb. (Rev 7:10)

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord  
and of his Messiah. (Rev 11:15)

## **Worship**

When the four living creatures finished their praise of God and the Lamb, the 24 elders “fell down and worshiped” (Rev 5:14). In Scripture, to worship someone literally means *to prostrate* before them. It is the ancient universal sign of reverence, submission, or obeisance to a monarch or any superior. The act does not imply the superior is divine.

At Solomon’s coronation, the people “bowed low and *did homage* to YHVH and to the king” (1 Chron 29:20). The Hebrew behind “did homage” is *השתחוה*, *hishtachavah* (Hitpael of *shachab*), the common verb used for worship of God. Since Solomon has now assumed the role of “David” and serves as God’s co-regent on earth, both he and God receive “worship.”<sup>24</sup> The LXX here has *proskuneo*, which in Koine Greek connotes bowing down and even kissing the hem of someone’s garment or feet or the ground they stood upon.

In the NT, *proskuneo* is the standard word for “worship.” Satan wanted Yeshua to “fall down and worship” him (Matt 4:9). Many people honored Yeshua by prostrating in his presence (Matt 2:11; 8:2; 14:33; 15:25). Just before he ascended to heaven, Yeshua’s disciples “worshiped him” (Luke 24:52, many older mss:  $\text{P}^{75}$   $\text{A}^c$  A B C K L). And in one passage, God commands his heavenly court and armies to “worship” Yeshua (Heb 1:6).

■ Similarly, the act of bending the knee(s) or kneeling on it is a sign of reverence. Paul said, “I bow my knees before the Father” (Eph 3:14). At the final coronation of Yeshua, everyone will bow and acknowledge that he is “Lord”—a confession that gives glory to God (Phil 2:9-11).

■ Another verb rendered “worship” is *latreuo*, which means *to serve*, usually in the Temple. Worship and service are parallel concepts (Deut 5:9). Inside the heavenly Temple, angelic beings continually “serve” God (Rev 7:15). Paul saw

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<sup>24</sup> *Hishtachavah* is used for God (Gen 22:5; Isa 66:23; Ps 97:7) or for fellow humans (Gen 23:7; 37:10; 49:8).

himself as a temple-servant, “*ministering* as a priest the gospel of God” to bring the Gentiles as an offering to God through the Messiah (Rom 15:16). “I appeal to you . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual worship* [lit. reasonable service] (Rom 12:1). “Let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28).

### **Temple Worship** **(To God, Through Messiah)**

As part of worship, believers bring various sacrifices—their praise, acts of self-giving, even obedience to Messiah—and offer them “to God” (Rom 14:18; 1 Pet 2:5), hoping they are “acceptable” or “pleasing to God” (Heb 13:16, 21). Even Yeshua gave himself up as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2).

Following the Temple floor plan, NT worship has a consistent movement or direction. People approach the Miqdash *through* the high priest Yeshua who leads them from the altar, past the Menorah/Lampstand, Bread and Incense, *toward* God, who is symbolically seated inside the Most Holy on the ark-throne (Heb 4:16; 7:25).

Messiah also died for sins once for all . . . that he might bring us to God.  
(1 Peter 3:18)

Through him both [Jew and Gentile] have access in one Spirit to the Father.  
(Eph 2:18)

We have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. (Rom 5:1-2)

No one comes to the Father but through me. (John 14:6b)

*Summary.* As we saw before, the Messiah is praised, honored, and served. But worship does not end at him, God’s High Priest. It moves ever inward—with him—into the Most Holy Place where his blood purchases reconciliation and fellowship with God.

### **Visions of Heaven and Mount Zion**

The hymns of Revelation emerge from visionary scenes of heavenly worship where God and Yeshua are honored. These scenes in turn draw upon older visions of God enthroned as king. A close study of Revelation 4–5 shows many connections to the

throne visions of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>25</sup> Of special note is the vision in Daniel 7. This report marks the most significant change in biblical visions. In each previous vision (except Exodus 24) God is surrounded by spirit servants. In Daniel 7:9-14, he and his royal entourage are joined by a “son of man,” someone with human, not divine, appearance.<sup>26</sup> To him God gives authority to share his throne.

This whole scene is mirrored in the NT vision described by Stephen, the first martyr for Yeshua. Nearing death at the hands of a hostile crowd, Stephen “gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Yeshua standing at the right hand of God. And he said: ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’ ” (Acts 7:55-56).

Daniel 7 (along with Psalm 110) became primary Hebrew Bible evidence in the apostles’ apologetic case for Yeshua’s right to sit (and rule) with God. As God’s co-regent *king*, he now rules creation (Eph 1:20-23). As *high priest*, Yeshua serves in the true Temple and “always lives to make intercession” for those “who draw near to God through him” (Heb 7:25).

### **The Ancient of Days**

Yeshua’s role as high priest is further emphasized by comparing the imagery in Daniel 7 with Revelation 1 and other texts.

The Ancient of Days sat [on his throne];  
His vesture was like white snow,  
And the hair of his head like pure wool. (Dan 7:9)

I saw . . . in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man,  
clothed in a robe reaching to the feet  
and girded across his chest with a golden sash.  
And his head and his hair were white like white wool, like snow;  
and his eyes were like a flame of fire;  
and his feet were like burnished bronze,  
when it has been caused to glow in a furnace. (Rev 1:13–15)

Because of the similar imagery some interpreters identify Yeshua as the Ancient of Days. But this overlooks the details. In Daniel 7:13, the “Son of Man” was escorted

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<sup>25</sup> Throne visions: Exod 24:9-11; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Isa 6:1-8; Ezek 1, 10; Zech 3; and Dan 7:9-14. See also Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Ps 82; 89:5-8; 149:1; Neh 9:6, etc. See the related article on this website entitled: “[Visions of the Heavenly Council in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.](#)”

<sup>26</sup> In Aramaic, *bar enash* (בר אנש) means son of mortal man. In contrast, an angelic being appears as “a son of God (or gods)” — *bar elahin* (בר אלהין), Dan 3:25).

into the heavenly courtroom and “came up *to the* Ancient of Days and was presented *before* him.” Yeshua is not both Son of Man and Ancient of Days. Though their attire is similar, there is a difference.

In Revelation 1:13 Yeshua wears a “golden sash” (belt or girdle) across his breast area. A sash is part of the attire of the high priest Aaron and his priest sons, though theirs is made of linen not gold (Exod 28:4; 29:9; Lev 8:7, 13; 16:4). Later in Daniel, the prophet sees “a certain man (*ish ehad*) dressed in linen [the attire of Temple priests], whose waist was girded with [*a belt of*] pure gold of Uphaz” (Dan 10:5). Whether this “man” is Gabriel mentioned earlier (8:16; 9:21) is not stated. He is at least some kind of heavenly priest who swears an oath “by Him who lives forever” (a possible allusion to the Aramaic phrase “Ancient of Days”; 12:6-7).

Revelation 15:6 refers to seven angelic priests serving in God’s Temple who are “clothed in linen . . . girded around their chests with golden sashes.” These may be the “seven angels who stand before God” (Rev 8:2) and the “seven spirits who are before [God’s] throne” (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

There is a “holy attire” (*badrat qodesh*) worn in heaven. It is what holy people should wear: “Worship the LORD in holy attire” (Ps 29:2; 97:9; 1 Chron 16:29; also 2 Chron 20:21). That human saints, heavenly (angelic) priests, Yeshua and God, are all clothed the same means a *shared holiness and community*, not a blending of identities or divine natures.

Based on the imagery in Revelation 1, Yeshua is thus clothed like the Ancient of Days but he is not him. He is his Father’s High Priest.

### **Other Visions of Heaven**

Throne room imagery is likely reflected in Paul’s charges to Timothy given “in the presence of God and of Messiah Yeshua and of the elect angels” (1 Tim 5:21) or “before God and Messiah Yeshua” (1 Tim 6:13; 2 Tim 4:1).

■ Similar imagery is found in Hebrews 12 where the author describes a disciple’s approach to Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem. This is not a vision *per se*, but a spiritual reality to be imagined in the minds of believers. Through Yeshua the High Priest, they are welcomed into the holy presence. The *Yom Kippurim* blood of the Messiah Lamb is sprinkled on their behalf to cleanse the ark-throne from contaminating sin.

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,  
the heavenly Jerusalem,  
and to **innumerable angels**, in festal gathering,  
and to **the assembly of the first-born** who are enrolled in heaven,

and to a judge, who is **God**, of all,  
and to **the spirits of just men** made perfect,  
and to **Jesus**, the mediator of a new covenant,  
and to the sprinkled blood. (Heb 12:22-24, RSV)

This imagery is consistent with Revelation's throne visions. It contains no imageless, theological abstractions. If we scan the scene with our mind's eye we can visualize it. But on second glance what's missing? Biblically speaking, nothing. This is an ancient Hebrew photo of God's divine council in his temple palace, with the significant addition of the Messiah Lamb, Yeshua. Some early Christian scribes, who had a trinitarian map in mind, quickly saw what—or *who*—was missing. So they altered their manuscripts in v. 23 from “the spirits of just men” to “**the Spirit** of just men,” to create a trinitarian pattern: God, Spirit, and Jesus. The biblical writer had, in their view, fallen short of orthodoxy. Such was a common reaction among many later scribes who felt compelled to correct the text of the New Testament so that it supported later theological views.<sup>27</sup>

### **Biblical Faith and the New Map**

This survey is meant to show that the links between the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible reveal a consistent pattern of worship in the NT.

- Jewish apostolic faith is centered on the Messiah Yeshua, but its worship pattern is not exclusively focused on him. It never becomes a “Yeshua-is-Yahweh/Jesus-is-God” sect. There is no monotheism or *monism* of the Son. He does not eclipse the one who sent him.
- Likewise, when praise and prayer ascend to God, there is always awareness of his anointed Lord residing at his right hand who mediates reconciliation between God and men. Thus there is no unitarianism of the Father, in the sense of modern Maimonidean Orthodox Judaism.
- There is also no *tri*-nitarian worship. The Spirit is never an object of devotion in the New Testament, as in later orthodox Christianity.

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<sup>27</sup> This change in Heb 12:23 first appears in fourth century Latin mss after the first trinitarian councils. A similar dogmatic correction was made to some Greek texts of 1 Cor 8:6 where Paul speaks of “one God . . . and one Lord.” The alteration reads: “one God . . . one Lord . . . **and one Holy Spirit.**” See discussion in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 491.

This Biblical map—with its precise language and imagery—captures the objects of faith in perpetual portrait. The image of God and his Lord ever remains before our eyes, from Matthew through Revelation.

Did Yeshua's apostles or the heavenly beings who worshiped in God's presence know what they were doing? Were their understandings and practices fully inspired? Was Stephen, just before his execution, given a false vision of divine reality? Were Yeshua's own practices of prayer and worship misleading acts due to the limitations of his humanity?

Lastly, were all these biblical images and patterns meant to be *prescriptive* for believers in all future ages? Or is the NT pattern of worship merely a temporary *Jewish* map to be superseded by one drawn by Diaspora Christian cartographers?

■ [Paul Sumner](#)

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<http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/monotheism/ntworship.pdf>

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