

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Home

1. Precedent for Worship

2. Foundation for Worship

3. Conviction for Worship

4. Galvanized for Worship

5. Worship Reference

CHAPTER 2

English, Hebrew, and Greek Words for Worship



Worship may be profound but it is not overly complicated. When God shows up people fall down—so do angels and demons. Transforming worship into a complex theological doctrine with sophisticated nuances misses the point. God’s infinite worth merits highest praise with unanimous veneration.

Defining Worship

According to N. T. Wright, “Our idea of worship has become impoverished”.¹ The words reverence, bow, fall, or prostrate appear nowhere in Britannica’s eight-page description of worship.² *Britannica* defines worship as a “response to the appearance of that which is accepted as the holy—that is, to a sacred, transcendent power or being.”

While God does not administer a vocabulary test to examine prospective worshipers, accurate definitions enhance our understanding and enrich our experience.

According to *Merriam-Webster*, worship comes from the Middle English word *worshipe*, which means worthiness, respect, or reverence paid to a divine being. *Worshipe* originally came from the Old English word *weorthscipe*, which meant worthiness or respect.³ According to Online Etymology Dictionary, *weorth* came from the Proto-Germanic word *werthaz*, which means worth. Affirming the many

¹ N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 7.

² <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9109487/worship> (8-4-12)

³ Merriam-Webster, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/worship> (8-4-12)

facedown expressions described in the Bible, its German base *wer* means to turn or bend.⁴

Merriam-Webster defines worship as, “reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; an act of expressing such reverence....”⁵ According to *Merriam-Webster* the word reverence reflects “a gesture of respect (as a bow)”; it means feeling or showing honor and respect with deference and especially “profound adoring awed respect”.⁶ Conforming to a more progressive service-oriented response, *Merriam-Webster* with others expands the definition of worship to include, “a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual; extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem.”⁷

Old Testament Worship

Shachah (shaw-khaw'), the primary Hebrew word for worship means, “to bow down or prostrate oneself in homage”.⁸ The NASB-1995 translates *shachah* as “worship” 83 times and “bow” or “prostrate” another 82 times. This tally includes variations of the word worship, e.g., worshiped, worshipping, worships, worshiper, worshipers, and the word bow, e.g., bowed, bow down, bowing, etc.

Numerous times when translators render *shachah* as worship, separate Hebrew words like *qadad*, *naphal*, *kara`*, and *barak* reinforce its association with bowing, kneeling, or falling facedown. For example:

Moses made haste to bow low [qadad] toward the earth and worship [shachah]. (Exodus 34:8 NAS)

David wrote,

Come, let us worship [shachah] and bow down [kara`], Let us kneel [barak] before the LORD our Maker. (Psalms 95:6 NAS)⁹

[King] **Jehoshaphat** bowed [qadad] his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down [naphal] before the LORD, worshipping [shachah] the LORD. (2 Chronicles 20:18 NAS)

⁴ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=worth> (3-14-2010)

⁵ <http://www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/worship> (8-4-12)

⁶ <http://www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/reverence> (8-4-12)

⁷ <http://www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/worship> (8-4-12)

⁸ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew/> (9-25-08)

⁹ David wrote Psalm 95 according to Hebrews 4:7

Deciphering the Data—How the Bible uses the word Worship

The following table lists Hebrew and Aramaic words associated with worship and bowing. It includes their translation in the New American Standard Bible (NASB-1995), their transliteration from Hebrew letters to English letters, how often they are used, and their meaning.¹⁰

HEBREW and ARAMAIC Words for WORSHIP (NAS Old Testament)				
Strong's Number	Translation	Transliteration	Total Uses	Primary Meaning
07812	Worship (s) 49x Worshipped 31x Worshipping 3x Bowed in worship 1x Bow (s, ed, ing) 64x Prostrate (ed, ing) 16x Homage 6x	Shachah (shaw-khaw') Verb	171	Worship 83x Bow, lie down, or Prostrate 82x Homage 6x
05647	Serve 200x Work, slave, perform, till, cultivate, etc. 77x Worship (ers) 13x (6 of 13 refer to God, i.e., 6 of 290 total uses)	`Abad (ä-väd') Verb	290	Serve
6915	Bow (ing) 15x	Qadad	15	Bow low
3721	Bow (ed, ing) 5x	Kaphaph	5	Bow down
3766	Bow (ed) 18x Kneel (s, ed, ing) 6x	Kara`	36	Bow, Bend, or Kneel
5307	Mostly fall or fell	Naphal	434	Fall or Fell
05456	Bow (fall) down 4x	Cagad (Aramaic)	4	Prostrate to worship graven images
05457	Worship (ed) 11x	Cegid (Aramaic)	12	Prostrate, worship, or homage
1288	Bless (es, ed, ing) 301x Kneel (or Knelt) 3x	Barak	319	Bless
04931	Worship 1x	Mishmereth	76	Ceremonial Obligation
06282	Worshippers 1x KJV	`athar	2x	Suppliant or Thick

¹⁰ Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Lexicon keyed to the "Theological Word Book of the Old Testament." These files are public domain. "The NAS Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon" <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas> (accessed 6-6-2013)

New Testament Worship

Proskuneo (pros-koo-neh'-o), the primary Greek word for worship means, “to do homage or make obeisance by kneeling or prostration” (whether to express respect or to make supplication).¹¹ *Proskuneo* is an action verb; it extends inner thoughts and feelings into actions. In the New Testament, the NAS translates *proskuneo* with renditions of “worship” 52 times and “bow” or “prostrate” another 8 times.

The following table lists Greek words associated with worship and bowing. It includes their translation in the NAS, their transliteration, how often they are used, and their meaning.¹²

GREEK Words for WORSHIP (NAS New Testament)				
Strong's Number	Translation	Transliteration	Total Uses	Primary Meaning
4352	Bow (ed, ing) 7x Prostrated 1x Worship 32x Worshipped 17x Worshippers 1x Worshiping 1x Worships 1x	Proskuneo (pros-koo-neh'-o) Verb	60	To Worship To show homage by kneeling or prostration
4353	Worshippers 1x	Proskunetes Noun	1	Worshippers
2999	Service 2x Divine worship 2x Service of worship 1x	Latreia (lat-ri'-ah) Noun	5	Sacred Service Adoration
3000	Offer 1x Serve (variations) 18x Worship 1x Worshiper 1x Worshippers 1x	Latreuo (lat-ryoo'-o) Verb	22	To Serve
4576	Devout 1x God fearing 3x Worship 4x Worshiper 2x	Sebomai (Seb'-Om-Ahee) Verb	10	To Revere or Worship
4573	Worshipped 1x	Sebazomai	1	Honor Religiously

¹¹ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/proskuneo.html>

¹² Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon" based on Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary plus others, keyed to the large Kittel and the "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament." These files are public domain. <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/> (9-25-08) (accessed 6-6-2013)

GREEK Words for WORSHIP (NAS New Testament)				
Strong's Number	Translation	Transliteration	Total Uses	Primary Meaning
4574	Object of worship 2x	Sebasma	2	Object of Worship
2151	Worship 1x	Eusebeo	2	Practice Piety
2356	Worship 1x	Threskeia	4	Religious Ceremony
2578	Bow (ed) 4x	Kampto	4	Kneel in Honor
1120	Knelt (on knees) 6x	Gonupeteo	6	Kneel
4098	Fall (s, ing, fell) 80x	Pipto	91	To Fall
4363	Fall down, fell 7x	Prospipto	8	To Fall Down

Ancient Greek literature associates *proskuneo* with pagan worshipers who kissed their hand in a token of reverence to false gods.¹³ Biblical worshipers do not participate in this activity. Greeks and Romans performed acts of pagan idolatry by raising a hand to the mouth, kissing it, and then waving it in the direction of an object of veneration. Neither Old nor New Testament endorses this pagan act of adoration.

The word “adore” literally means, “carrying to one's mouth”. In Latin, *ad* means, “to” and *ora* means, “mouth”. After kissing the hand, the pagan worshiper (generally with head covered) turned around clockwise. Sometimes, Greek worshipers kissed the feet or knees of pagan idols. They adored Saturn and Hercules with a bare head.¹⁴ The Bible never describes angels or humans worshiping God in this manner.

While some customs associated with worship suggest a Greco-Roman influence, the Bible neither confirms nor adopts them. In addition, pagan traditions instituted in Greece and Rome do not reflect the facedown gesture for worshiping God described in heaven or in the Old Testament. The Bible only documents individuals and groups who bowed in worship without ever kissing or waving to God or Christ (or to angels, demons, and idols).

Stereotypical Italians retain the Greco-Roman tradition associated with the English word adoration and the Greek word *proskuneo*. They bunch their fingers together, kiss the tips, and then extend their arm toward the object of affection, such as a person or a delicious food.

¹³ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/> (1-9-07)

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration> (accessed 5-1-07)

Encountering the presence of the Lord should bring us to our knees and occasionally sweep us off our feet. If our Heavenly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not evoke a response of facedown reverence, we probably don't know Him or His accomplishments well enough. The more we embrace God for who He is, the more completely we will humble ourselves, and the more decisively we will worship Him. Facedown reverence extends beyond superficial formality and kinesthetic routine. It's a deliberate response triggered by divine reality. When the truth about God replaces theological concepts, philosophical notions, and opinionated reflections, worship comes naturally—sometimes spontaneous.

True worshipers do not mutate and evolve with the vernacular that frames them. As wordsmiths, songwriters, authors, and theologians influence our understanding of worship, connecting with the truth about God will always set us straight, i.e., facedown. The veracity of His love literally sweeps us off our feet. When properly understood, God's presence, performance, and promises are more than we can stand.

[Previous Chapter: Worship is a Big Word with a Complex History](#)

[Next Chapter: Worshipers Who How and Why](#)

[Home](#)

[1. Precedent for Worship](#)

[2. Foundation for Worship](#)

[3. Conviction for Worship](#)

[4. Galvanized for Worship](#)

[5. Worship Reference](#)