

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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CHAPTER 25

Worshiping Humans, Angels, Demons, or Satan

Worshiping Humans

Throughout history, people have bowed before royalty, nobility, judges, and aristocrats. Citizens and aliens alike have adopted this facedown posture to convey honor, solicit favor, or obtain mercy. Israel implemented human homage when they rejected God as their king and chose the rule of men.¹ While all Israel including Bathsheba bowed submissively before King David, King Solomon bowed to honor his mother Bathsheba.² In various Asian cultures, bending at the waist or bowing the head remains a polite social gesture; it conveys greeting, gratitude, honor, respect, and remorse or apology. Reminiscent of Imperial Europe, royal families have long received bow-and-scrape fanfare. In a show of ceremony, men bow down by drawing back their right leg and scraping their right foot across the floor. Pressing the right arm across their waist, they sweep their left arm down and out for balance. Self-deprecating bows convey respect and imply loyalty. However, without acknowledging divine veneration, they fall short of worship.

According to Wikipedia, the Romans worshiped deified emperors along with a pantheon of 208 contrived gods.³ Influenced by misinformed tradition based on mistaken values, Cornelius (a Roman centurion) worshiped Peter (a preeminent apostle) with facedown reverence. The consequences for this misdirected homage were corrective not punitive. Inflating Peter's identity and venerating him beyond cultural courtesy triggered a brisk exhortation clarifying the distinction between worshiping God and honoring a person.

¹ 1 Samuel 8:6-8

² 1 Samuel 25:23, 1 Kings 1:31, 1 Chronicles 29:20, 1 Kings 2:19

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_deities (accessed 3-3-2021)

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped [proskuneo] him. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." (Acts 10:25-26 NAS)

Worshiping Angels

Exiled on Patmos, John worshiped an angel after experiencing a series of extraordinary revelations. Again, the consequences for this gesture were corrective. They triggered a stern admonition punctuated by a decisive angelic command to worship God.

*At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "**Do not do it!** I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. **Worship God!** For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10 NIV)*

While Satan may appear disguised as an angel of light, the angelic messenger that John worshiped did not masquerade with luminary deception or flaunt supernatural enticements.⁴ Worshiping an angel in the brilliance of the moment was perhaps an understandable blunder. Compromised by advanced age, perilous pressure, physical deprivation, and heightened emotions, John demonstrated circumstantial vulnerability. No matter how knowledgeable or well-connected we may be, as humans we are susceptible to worship erroneously.

John ranks as an eminent apostle privileged to receive elite training directly from Jesus before and after His resurrection. Distinguished as a loyal friend and beloved companion, Jesus designated John a "son" responsible for the care of His mother Mary. Having experienced heavenly visions and inspired revelations, John describes individuals and groups worshiping idols, demons, and Satan.⁵ Under various degrees of compulsion, they worshiped the dragon, the beast, and the image of the beast—triggering severe consequences.⁶

Accurate revelation, authentic experience, sincere love, awe, and wonder did not prevent John from worshiping an angel. He knew the facts better than most. John wrote five of sixty-six books in the Bible. He ranks as a leading authority in God's love, experiencing Jesus' *agape* firsthand. Sound doctrine, personal encounters, and intimate affection were insufficient. John bowed to worship an angel on two separate occasions. Having experienced true worship and misdirected

⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:14 NAS

⁵ Revelation 9:20

⁶ Revelation 13:4, 8, 12; 14:11; 16:2

worship, he repeated the same mistake assuming a position of facedown reverence before an angel.

*...And when I had heard and seen them [revelations], **I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel** who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “**Do not do it!** I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. **Worship God!**” (Revelation 22:8-9 NIV)*

Falling, Bowing, or Worshiping an ANGEL				
Individuals	Times	Hebrew Greek	Association	NAS Verse
Balaam	1	Qadad	Bowed before the Angel of the Lord	Num 22:31
David and the Elders	1	Naphal	Fell on their face in response to the Angel of the Lord	1 Chr 21:16-17
Daniel	1	Nathan	Bowed in response to an angel speaking	Dan 10:15
Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women	1	Klino	Bowed in terror before two men in dazzling clothes at Jesus’ tomb	Luke 24:5
John	2	Proskuneo	Fell down to worship an angel	Rev 19:10
		Proskuneo		Rev 22:8-9

While John fell down to worship an angel, Balaam, David, Israel’s Elders, Daniel, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women bowed or fell on their face before an angel in reverent fear, respect, and/or supplication.

1. Balaam bowed (in fear or respect) in response to seeing the angel of the Lord (a possible theophany or visible appearance of God).

*Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he **bowed** [qadad] **all the way to the ground**. (Numbers 22:31 NAS)*

2. **David and the Elders** fell on their faces (in fear and supplication) in response to **the angel of the Lord** (a possible theophany).

*Then David lifted up his eyes and saw **the angel of the LORD** standing between earth and heaven, with his drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusa-*

lem. Then David and the elders, covered with sackcloth, **fell** [naphal] **on their faces**. David said to God, "Is it not I who commanded to count the people? Indeed, I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done? O LORD my God, please let Your hand be against me and my father's household, but not against Your people that they should be plagued." (1 Chronicles 21:16-17 NAS)

3. **Daniel** bowed facedown (in fear or respect) in response to an angelic visitation.

When he had spoken to me according to these words, I **turned** [nathan] **my face toward the ground** and became speechless. (Daniel 10:15 NAS)

...I **bowed** [nathan] **with my face toward the ground** and was speechless. (Daniel 10:15 NIV)

4. At Jesus' empty tomb, **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women** bowed to the ground in terror before two dazzling "men".

While they were perplexed about this, behold, **two men** suddenly stood near them **in dazzling clothing**; and as **the women** were **terrified and bowed** [klino] **their faces to the ground**, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? (Luke 24:5 NAS)

5. Near the end of his life on earth, **John** mistakenly fell down twice to worship an angel. Each time John worshiped the angel, an imperative command followed—worship God.

Then I **fell** [pipto] at his feet to **worship** [proskuneo] him [angel]. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; **worship** [proskuneo] God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10 NAS)

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I **fell down** [pipto] to **worship** [proskuneo] at the feet of the **angel** who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. **Worship** [proskuneo] God." (Revelation 22:8-9 NAS)

Worship Associated with DEMONS or SATAN

Worshipping Satan or a demonic associate evokes severe consequences, very different from worshipping a human leader or celestial angel. Expressing veneration to satanic beings invites a punitive outcome. Stated in no uncertain terms by an angelic messenger sent from God:

***“If anyone** worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of **God's fury**, which has been poured **full strength** into the cup of his **wrath**. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”* (Revelation 14:9-11 NIV)

The phrase, “*If anyone*” suggests a cause-and-effect scenario. The consequences for worshiping a satanic being involve God’s fury and full-strength wrath. Burning torment may or may not be time limited, but the resulting smoke lingers permanently. In the end, a clear distinction separates worshipers. True worshipers worship God in spirit and truth and false worshipers worship satanic beings in fear and deception.

Before facing worship ultimatums from tyrants and terrorists or rouge religious leaders and Satan, wise worshipers acknowledge the risks and benefits and prepare accordingly.

- They connect with the Holy Spirit for valiant love, power, and self-discipline.⁷
- Fortified with resolute habit patterns, they maintain dauntless confidence for worshiping God alone.
- Connecting with the truth about God, worshipers cultivate reliable expertise in spiritual discernment and supernatural courage.

Worshipping Satanic Substitutes for God in the Revelation				
Potential Worshipers	Times	Greek	Association	NAS Verse
Rest of Mankind	1	Proskuneo	Worship Idols	Rev 9:20
Rest of Mankind	1	Proskuneo	Worship Demons	Rev 9:20
Whole Earth	1	Proskuneo	Worship the Dragon (i.e., Satan or the devil)	Rev 13:4 (Rev 12:9)
Whole Earth, Inhabitants not in the book of life	3	Proskuneo	Worship The Beast	Rev 13:4
		Proskuneo		Rev 13:8
		Proskuneo		Rev 13:12
Unspecified	1	Proskuneo	Worship the image of the beast	Rev 13:15

⁷ 2 Timothy 1:7 NIV

1. Idol and Demon worship

*The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues [fire, smoke and sulfur], did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to **worship** [proskuneo] **demons**, and the **idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood**, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; (Rev 9:20 NAS)*

2. Worshiping the Dragon, Beast, and Satan with potential antichrist implications

Some theologians consider the first beast in Revelation 13 to be antichrist related. However, the Bible avoids mentioning antichrist in association with worship, and never designates antichrist as a proper name. The word antichrist (*antichristos*) appears five times in the Bible, exclusively rendered by John in four epistle verses.⁸ John indicates that many antichrists had appeared along with the spirit of antichrist. These deceivers characteristically deny God the Father and Son, and do not confess Jesus or acknowledge that He came in the flesh.

*“And **the great dragon** was thrown down, **the serpent of old** who is **called the devil and Satan**” (Revelation 12:9 NAS)*

*[the whole earth] **worshiped** [proskuneo] **the dragon** because he gave his authority to the beast; and they **worshiped** [proskuneo] **the beast**, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” (Revelation 13:4 NAS)*

*All who dwell on the earth will **worship** [proskuneo] him [**the beast**], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. (Revelation 13:8 NAS)*

*[A second beast] exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to **worship** [proskuneo] **the first beast**, whose fatal wound was healed. (Revelation 13:12 NAS)*

3. Worshiping an Image of the Beast

The word “beast” [Gr, therion] likely refers metaphorically to a brutal, savage, and ferocious person or genetically engineered human-animal-machine hybrid.

*And it was given to him [a second beast] to give breath to the image of the [first] beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not **worship** [proskuneo] the **image of the beast** to be killed. (Revelation 13:15 NAS)*

⁸ 1 John 2:18; 1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7

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