

UNIT TWO

WORSHIP UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

- **The replacement of the temple**
 - The gospels give various indications of the way that Jesus himself replaces the temple in the plan and purpose of God.
 - As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus represented God's royal presence and authority more fully than the temple.
 - Jesus will continue to draw many into relationship with himself through the witness and teaching of the disciples – becoming the centre of salvation and blessing for the nations.
 - The tearing of the curtain from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' death further suggests the opening of a new way of access to God.
 - Jesus' cleansing of the temple more explicitly reveals him as the one sent to replace the institutions of the Mosaic covenant.
 - Jesus' claims of John 2:19 referred to his resurrection body – the temple of the new age in the Fourth Gospel is the crucified and resurrected Son of God.
- **Worship 'in spirit and truth'**
 - In his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus begins to focus on the question of how to worship God acceptably.
 - With the expression 'a time is coming and has now come', he develops a notion that his ministry initiates a totally different way of relating to God.
 - Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus the new temple of his body is raised up – he is to become the means by which the Father obtains true worshippers from every nation.
 - 'Spirit' and 'truth' are closely connected – no-one can see the kingdom of God or experience the blessings of the End Time without being born again by the Spirit.
 - Jesus is the means to God-honouring worship – this worship is possibly only for those who recognise his true identity and yield him their allegiance.
 - 'Worship' now refers to the relationship with God which Jesus makes possible – this is not tied to any earthly place, the exalted Christ is where God is to be acknowledged and honoured.

- **Jesus as the object of worship**

- Old Testament worship terms are used in the New Testament to show that the Son of God is to be accorded the homage and service due to the LORD God of Israel.
- When Jesus walked on the water and calmed the storm, ‘those who were in the boat worshipped him’ – the responses of the women and disciples to the risen Christ was similar.
- In Matthew 28: 19, Jesus says ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ – the charge that follows implies that the disciples must call on people everywhere to express their homage to Christ.
- Luke uses worship terminology in his account of the ascension – when Jesus was taken up into heaven the disciples ‘worshipped him’.
- This may have indicated that this was, at last, the real recognition of Christ by the disciples.
- All this suggests that the aim of Christian preaching should be to bring people to worship Christ in the sense of yielding their allegiance to him as Saviour and Lord.

JESUS’ SACRIFICE AND THE WORSHIP OF THE NEW COVENANT

- **The worship that Jesus makes possible**

- At the heart of humanity’s rebellion against God lies a refusal to honour him as God and give him thanks.
- It is now possible for all to engage with God in a new way, and offer the worship that is pleasing to him.
- Jesus’ death is ‘a sacrifice of atonement by means of his blood, to be received through faith’ (Romans 3:25).
- The sprinkling of sacrificial blood was a crucial part of the Day of Atonement – Jesus has fulfilled and replaced this ritual.
- Romans 12:1 suggests that the essence of Christian worship is the presentation of ourselves to God in Christ.
- The service that is called for is obedience motivated by faith in Jesus and what he has done for us.
- Acceptable worship is the service rendered by those who truly understand the gospel and want to live out its implications in every sphere of life.

- **Worship and Christian ministry**

- In Romans 1, Paul makes clear that gospel preaching is the focus and goal of all his activity.
- Paul refers to the preaching by which he enables the Gentiles to offer themselves to God as an acceptable sacrifice (Romans 15).
- Paul also refers to the service offered by Gentile churches to ‘the poor among the saints at Jerusalem’ – this service is financial support, implying the notion of worshipping or serving God by means of our service to one another.

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD THROUGH JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST

- **Jesus’ high priestly ministry**

- The writer to the Hebrews goes beyond Paul in what he says about the ministry of Christ fulfilling and replacing the priesthood and cult associated with the Old Covenant.
- Sacrifices and offerings are all set aside by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- As high priest of the New Covenant, Jesus has entered once for all into the heavenly sanctuary – Hebrews regularly insists on the unique, unrepeatable character of Jesus’ sacrifice.
- The priestly ministry of Jesus is superior to that of the Old Testament because it involved the offering of himself as a pure, unblemished sacrifice to God.
- As a heavenly high priest, ‘he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them’ (Hebrews 7:25).
- The sacrifices, altar and priesthood of the Old Testament all find their fulfilment in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

- **Experiencing the benefits of Christ’s saving work**

- Hebrews encourages us to keep on ‘drawing near’ to God with confidence (4:16) – we can do this without the aid of human priesthood because of the priestly mediation of Jesus.
- The writer emphasises the importance of confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness through the blood of Jesus – this is how we first take hold of the benefits of Christ’s death.
- We must draw near to God in a personal way, but it is also possible to come into the heavenly presence together with others – we are encouraged to engage or meet with God together.

- **Serving God in the perspective of Hebrews**

- As in Romans, Christian worship in Hebrews is also the service rendered by those who have truly grasped the gospel of God's grace and its implications (12:28).
- Hebrews 13 shows how this should be done — including entertaining strangers, visiting prisoners and honouring marriage.
- Hebrews restates that Old Testament worship finds its fulfilment in Christ — we are to offer a sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus, 'the fruit of lips that confess his name' (13:15).
- Believers are encouraged to acknowledge Christ in the world, in the face of opposition and suffering — particularly through public testimony and evangelism.
- Praise to God is certainly not just singing hymns or giving thanks in a congregational context, although this can be a stimulus to effective proclamation elsewhere.
- To do good and share with others is also acceptable worship, it is not cultivating favour but an expression of gratitude for what Christ has already done for us.