

Enthroned Upon the Praises: Understanding the Functions of Worship through Temple Theology in Revelation 4 and 5

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Abstract

Whereas other scholarship often focuses on the object(s) of worship in Revelation, this study examines the world-building functions of worship in Revelation 4 and 5 through its participation in temple theology. This paper establishes the meaning of temple theology by surveying various ancient Near Eastern cultures, and it connects worship and temple theology by calling attention to worship's functions of identification and orientation. This study then examines the worship in Revelation 4 and 5 through the lens of temple theology and draws conclusions about the functions of worship based on this examination. Because of worship's role in establishing the new, world-encompassing temple, worship can be viewed as an act of creation, reverberating from the very throne of God.

Keywords: *worship, Revelation, temple, temple theology, creation*

Introduction

When John is invited into the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 and 5, he witnesses a scene of glory and worship. Beauty, power, sight, and sound radiate from the throne, and so too do worshippers. Much has been said and debated about those who sit upon the throne, and by the standard of the four living creatures, there will be no need to rest from saying more. However, far too little has

been said about those who surround the throne, who speak and sing the praise of God and the Lamb. In fact, if the intuition of many Christian churches is correct—where Revelation “is rarely used as the basis for a sermon, yet in those same churches the words of Revelation are regularly sung”—then it may be that the most appropriate place to begin to understand God and the Lamb is within the circles of worship that surround them (Koester 2017, 119).¹ In other words, if Christianity at large most regularly engages with Revelation within the practice of worship, then perhaps the worship within the book of Revelation can illuminate the Christian practice of worship. This study demonstrates that Revelation 4-5 communicates its scenes of worship within the context of temple theology, and in doing so, provides a metaphysical and socio-religious worldview for its community, which allows worshippers to understand their worship as receiving and participating in a new creation.

1. Temple Theology

Revelation encodes much of what it says within the language of temple theology, so the first task on the way to understanding what Revelation 4 and 5 says about worship is to understand the significance of a temple. To that end, this section elaborates on the significance of a temple in ancient Near Eastern cultures (including ancient Israel, Rome, the early Christians, and many others). This section speaks broadly but briefly about many unique (but related) cultures, and consequently, does not give them the level of individual attention they deserve. However, this kind of survey does replicate an important truth about temples in general and in the book of Revelation: temples existed alongside one another, in harmony and in competition, sharing many things in common yet remaining ultimately distinct. This study categorizes the fundamental elements of temple theology into three parts: 1) the temple is the house of the god; 2) the temple is the link between heaven and earth; 3) the temple is the center/symbol of the cosmos.

1.1. *House of God*

Many ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples demonstrated that their temples served as homes for their gods by the names they gave to them, and it is clear from the way Old Testament (OT) authors spoke about the temple in Jerusalem that Israel

1 Michael Gorman (2011, 17) makes a similar point. His observation is that despite the “problems and concerns” of those who dismiss the canonicity of Revelation (as well as those who ‘hyper-canonicalize’ it), Revelation has often been read most responsibly by those “who have read the book sensitively and creatively, stressing especially its aesthetic dimensions, or its ability to excite the imagination in the contemplation and worship of God, or its offer of hope for the oppressed.”

also thought of its temple as God's house.² A sacred text might even describe a god as personally affirming the temple as their house and place of rest. The term "rest" reveals much of the significance behind the temple as a house. For example, the *Enuma Elish* describes the gods' decision to build Babylon and its temple as a decision centered on the idea of rest:

Let us make a shrine of great renown:
Your chamber will be our resting place wherein we may repose.
Let us erect a shrine to house a pedestal
Wherein we may repose when we finish (the work).
When Marduk heard this,
He beamed as brightly as the light of day,
Build Babylon, the task you have sought.
Let bricks for it be molded, and raise the shrine! (Lambert 2013, 113).

In the *Enuma Elish*—and in the myths of many other ANE cultures—a god defeats or otherwise subdues the forces of chaos, which make civilization impossible, and afterwards rests in their temple (Beale 2020, 65-66; Hundley 2013, 43). The gods' rest can imply a kind of anthropomorphic exhaustion (or even laziness), but the true significance of their rest is that the great task of ordering the cosmos has been completed, and the new age of the sovereign god's rule can begin. Rest is not a simple biological necessity; rest has been accomplished. The established house demonstrates that this rest is secure.

When the god is at rest, human life (in the example above, "Babylon") can flourish because "stability, security, and order" (i.e., rest) have been achieved (Walton 2006, 116). The temple, as the house of the god, is the solidification of the rest that the god achieved and upon which humanity depends. God's rest after creation in Genesis 2:1-3, God's instructions for the tabernacle after rescuing Israel from Egypt in Exodus 25-31, and God's promise of rest for David in connection with David's desire to build a house for him in 2 Samuel 7 all operate within the concept of temple theology (Beale 2020, 61-66). Similarly, both Jesus and Augustus are portrayed as victorious, rest-bringers who founded a temple.³

The house of the god also provided for (or demanded) human ritual maintenance. "The deity's presence was marked by the image of the deity," which had to be cared for by various rituals (Walton 2006, 116). These rituals often involved basic household needs or tasks, such as "food, drink, bathing, and clothing"

2 Hundley demonstrates this fact for Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Syrio-Palestine temples (2013, 34, 69, 95, and 118 respectively). With less of a linguistic focus, Beale (2020, 52-53) demonstrates the same from quotes about building a "house" for an Egyptian god, a Rashu and Arashu god, and Israel's God. Christians also continued to use this language in their writings (e.g. 1 Pet 2:4-6).

3 On Jesus, see, for one example, Matthew 11:28-12:6. For more discussion on Jesus and his temple, see Beale 2020, 176 and 183. On Augustus, see Friesen 2001, 34.

(Hundley 2013, 45).⁴ To contribute to the rest of the god and the upkeep of the temple through offerings and purity codes was to continually strengthen the relationship between the god and the world and was therefore a means of human participation in ongoing creation.

In summary, the temple, as the house of a god, communicates that a victorious, sovereign god has completed creation and is now ruling and sustaining it. The house of the god also provides the available presence of that god and the opportunity for humans to both benefit from and participate in their god's rest.

1.2. Link between Heaven and Earth

The temple, as the house of god, anticipates another role of the temple—the 'link between heaven and earth'—since if the heavenly god is present among their earthly people in the house, then the temple has become a place that brings heaven and earth together. Furthermore, like the house of god, the names of many ANE temples make it clear that the people viewed them as a link between heaven and earth (Levenson 1984, 295).⁵ The OT seems to follow this pattern as well, since it can use 'heaven and earth' as a metonym for Jerusalem or its temple (Levenson 1984 294-295). Likewise, in the New Testament (NT), the event that reconciles God and humanity (Jesus' death and resurrection) is also what leads Jesus' followers to understand him as a temple (Jn 2:19-22).

The temple, as the link between heaven and earth, focuses on the relationship between a god and their people. This relationship, which is secured and sustained by the temple, connects humans to heavenly experiences of space, time, and identity. Spatially, the temple was situated on earth, *and* it was also located in heaven. Hundley summarizes the temple structures of the ANE as "more than simply bringing heaven to earth (and ontologically belonging to a different sphere of existence), the temple created heaven on earth. Thus, ancient Near Eastern people took great pains to communicate that their temple, as the Christian refrain expresses, was 'in the world but not of it'" (Hundley 2013, 135). In temporal language, the temple allowed traffic between the present time and the time when the god first established life and order.⁶ Through the temple, the distant, ancient power that created the cosmos could accomplish the same work in present space and time as it did in the beginning. By this link with heaven to the initial acts of creation, humans could discover their significance in accordance with the character and motivations of their god.

4 Also, see Hundley 2013, 76-77, 119, 172-173, and Walton 2006, 116.

5 Also, Hundley 2013, 77. One model example is Ishtar's temple at Nippur, which was named Eduranki, "bond between heaven and earth" (Walton 2006, 116).

6 This is why the furniture, images, and even the structure of an ANE temple (including the temple in Jerusalem) often symbolized the primordial cosmos (Hundley 2013, 45).

1.3. Center and Symbol of the Cosmos

The temple, as the center and symbol of the cosmos, was the “primary image of the temple,” and it can be observed on multiple levels (Walton 2006, 129). On a societal level, the temple was the center of life in the ANE. The gods were gods of fertility, harvest, weather, justice, love, victory, etc.—these are not only spiritual or godly things. These are the practical building blocks of human community, and they are defined, enabled, and sustained by god through the temple. It is with this in mind that Lundquist says the temple was “the central, organizing, unifying institution in ancient Near Eastern society” (Lundquist 1983, 213). Specifically, this meant that the temple was the economic, moral, judicial, and political center of the world. Normal life flowed through the temple daily, and people expected the temple to make normal life possible.⁷

On a symbolic level, the temple was a miniature representation of the cosmos. As with the other aspects of a temple, ANE peoples made this function clear in the names they gave to their temples.⁸ Representing the cosmos was primarily achieved through symbolic architectural organization, and certain sections of the temple were populated with images and furniture corresponding to the meaning of that section. For example, the temple in Jerusalem (as well as many other sacred spaces in the Bible) had a three-part structure, which corresponded to the three major divisions of the cosmos (Beale 2020, 31). By miniaturizing the cosmos, a temple enabled a kind of travel—and thus relationship—to and from the far reaches of the cosmos, especially heaven. Since the temple (or at least some part of it) truly represented heaven, the god could dwell there and remain holy. Not entirely earth, and not entirely heaven, “the temple was in some ways a miniature world of its own” (Hundley 2013, 136).

2. Connecting Worship and Temple Theology

As Walton (2006, 116) begins to explain temples in the ANE, he draws a line between temples and worship. He says, “Worship took place at temples, but temples were not designed primarily to provide a place for worship.” Walton distances temples from worship to restore a deeper meaning to ANE temples, viewing them as more than just places of worship. Having explored temple theology with Wal-

7 This can also be demonstrated in the negative, where the destruction of a temple would be “calamitous and fatal to the community” (Lundquist 1983, 216). Lundquist mentions Lamentations, Haggai, the “Lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur,” and “The Curse of Agade” as examples which illustrate that the destruction of the temple was understood cosmologically.

8 For example, “Erattakisarra,” which means “house, mountain of the entire world.” For this and other examples, see Hundley 2013, 82.

ton and others in the previous section, the aim of this section is now to bring temple and worship together again in a way that honors ANE temple theology and, ultimately, illuminates Revelation 4 and 5.

Defining worship can be difficult. Questions immediately arise about who or what can be worshipped, as well as what does or does not constitute worship.⁹ Since this study focuses on the relationship between temple theology and worship, it takes a functional approach to defining worship.¹⁰ In other words, this study examines how worship (particularly Christian worship) contributes to the principles of temple theology outlined above.

2.1. *Worship Identifies*

Richard Bauckham's definition of Jewish/Christian worship begins to bring worship and temple theology back together, even if that was not his primary intent. He says, "In religious practice, it was worship that signaled the distinction between God and every creature, however exalted" (Bauckham 1998, 118). Bauckham seeks to investigate the worship of Jesus by early Christians, and he employs this definition of worship to argue that early Christian worship positioned Jesus on the same side of the distinguishing line of worship as God.

Interestingly, James Dunn, who cautions against Bauckham's conclusion that Jesus was worshipped like God by early Christians, still operates with a similar definition of worship. As he surveys more than twenty Greek words, phrases, and related words for worship in the New Testament, Dunn continually emphasizes "that the writers of the New Testament have only worship of God in view as desirable and commendable" (Dunn 2010, 17). Furthermore, after examining Second Temple Judaism at large, Dunn finds that worship was characterized by the fact that only God could receive it (Dunn 2010, 90).¹¹ Across the various meanings and circumstances of worship, both Bauckham and Dunn draw out a more general characteristic of Christian worship—worship is for God alone. But Bauckham and Dunn are not the only scholars thinking along these lines.

As Ninian Smart (1972, 52) explores the concept of worship, he argues that worship is a vital part of how one knows that a god is a god: "[to be] a god is to be worshipped." Using worship, or a worshipful state, as the means to sketch or begin to describe an encounter with the divine is the concept behind Rudolf Otto's

9 Ninian Smart's monograph, *The Concept of Worship*, is an excellent exploration of these questions.

10 Other prominent methods for defining worship include James White's phenomenological approach in his book *Introduction to Christian Worship*, or James Dunn's more linguistic approach in *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus: The New Testament Evidence*.

11 Dunn (2010, 28) does admit that Jesus seems to sometimes be "on both sides of the worship relationship," but Dunn still maintains that this exclusivity of worship to God was critical to Jewish/Christian understanding of worship.

'mysterium tremendum et fascinans,' which are the terms he argues best capture “the quite unique and incomparable experience of solemn worship” (Otto 1958, 9). To Otto, worship is epistemological; it is the moment in which someone can experience (or gain some kind of true knowledge about) that which is wholly other. Several other scholars, especially those analyzing Revelation, also opt for an identifying or knowledge-based definition of worship.¹²

As Christian worship is defined by identification, knowledge, or discovery of God, its relationship to temple theology becomes clearer. If worship is for God alone, then worship sets God apart. Worship points to God, and says of him, “here, and here alone, is the true holy One.” This function of worship ties it to the themes of sovereignty and presence in the home-of-the-god aspect of temple theology. To continually acknowledge that God is God in worship, in the terms of the house of the god, communicates that God is the one who established the world’s order and that he is also the one who maintains it. Additionally, it communicates that God is available and knowable. So, worship relates to temple theology by the concept of identification, or indeed, revelation. In this sense, worship is a re-revelation of the initial revelation of the divine, which first founded the cosmos, like the after-shocks of an earthquake.

2.2. *Worship Orients*

Just like the house of the god implied the link between heaven and earth, worship’s role of identification leads to a second critical function of worship: worship orients. Temple theology presents the cosmos as bound to a certain order because it is bound to a certain god, and worship serves as an expression of and orientation towards all the realities that this bond creates.

This can (and should) be put in more concrete terms. According to Larry Hurtado (1999, 2), in the ancient world, “worship was seen as the characteristic and crucial expression of one’s religious orientations and commitments.” These orientations and commitments permeated all of life; “birth, death, marriage, the domestic sphere, civil and wider political life, work, the military, socializing, entertainment, arts, music—all were imbued with religious significance and associations” (Hurtado 1999, 9). Likewise, Stephen L. Cook (2020, 754) describes these “socio-religious functions of worship” well:

[Worship] expressed and buttressed the shared values and convictions of the community of YHWH, or, better, of specific Yahwistic groups. It publicly embodied religious orientations and habits. It enacted the traditions and teachings of the societal authority or segment that authorized and choreographed it. Participants in Israelite worship publicly acknowledged the worldview and attendant lifestyle communicated as social meaning by the proceedings.

12 See Keener 2000, 237; Sailors 1994, 85; Bauckham 1993, 32.

Every one of these social moments invited (or even demanded) worship. To fail to worship in these moments was to exist unlinked from the world, which is to not exist at all.¹³

Therefore, (as in the previous section) worship's orienting function connects with the founding of the world, but instead of identifying a creator god, worship participates with the creator god. What the god achieved at the beginning, worship achieves in miniature, turning all the large and small parts of life back towards the kind of world the god created and the kind of role the god assigned to humans within that world. When one worships in and through birth, death, marriage, work, etc., one shapes their world according to their object of worship. Thus, worship has an orienting function, which says not only "here is the center," but also "here we are because of it."

Worshippers (re)reveal the center of the cosmos, but they are also revealed by it. Others have expressed this function of worship in different terms. Alexander Schmemmann and others describe this as the transformative element of worship.¹⁴ Psalm 36:9 captures the idea in more poetic terms: "in Your light we see light." Simply put, worship affects not only the worshippers but also all those who surround them. It enables navigation of the social world by orientation around a sacred north, and wherever it is present, it reinforces that orientation upon its surroundings. In this function, worship clearly relates to the link-between-heaven-and-earth and center/symbol-of-the-cosmos themes.

3. Worship and Revelation's Temple

With the necessary background in place, the book of Revelation (and its insights on worship) can now take center stage. In this study, chapters 4 and 5 will be the main focus. While the entire text could be considered an instrument/act of worship and references to temples and temple theology appear throughout the book, chapters 4 and 5 carry much of the book's message on the interplay between worship and temple.¹⁵

13 As Eugene Peterson (1991, 60) eloquently says of worship, "If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustained purpose."

14 Drawing on several of the themes discussed above, Schmemmann (1998, 15) says, "The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him." See also Cillers 2009, 5.

15 On Revelation as a liturgical text, see Gorman 2011, 38-39; Stuckenbruck 2011, 236; Bauckham 1993, 3.

3.1. Chapter 4 Analysis

From the descriptions that John gives in chapter 4 and their strong connections with temple symbolism, it is clear that John has been invited into the heavenly temple.¹⁶ Even if John's depiction of the heavenly temple somehow escapes notice in chapters 4 and 5, the casual mention of "the altar" in 6:9 and the explicit mention of God's temple in 7:15 confirm it. After the scene is set, John witnesses the first of many acts of worship.

The four living creatures praise God, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (Rev 4:8). In a different vision of the heavenly temple, Seraphim surround God's throne and call out to each other, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of armies. The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3). This line from Isaiah is temple theology in a nutshell, but in Revelation, the line reappears somewhat differently. The first half—"holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty"—maps well onto Isaiah 6:3 and would have been a familiar formula in the liturgy of Jewish synagogues (Stuckenbruck 2011, 245). The second half is completely different. There is no direct mention of the earth or of God's glory. The spatial effects of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 are substituted for temporal ones. Time is defined by the presence of the God who was and is and is to come. In contrast with the Beast, who "was, and is not, and will come," the relationship between past and future remains unbroken through God's present presence. Thus, God continues to bridge the gap between the present and the beginning, a time that Levenson (1984, 297) calls "protological" time—the world "as it was meant to be and as it was on the first Sabbath." God will also bring that first time to its fullness again in the future because he "is to come." Importantly for John's audience (who must deal with the present), the present is not lost between the past and future. Even though the earth is absent from Revelation 4:8, spatial implications can never be wholly separated from temporal ones, and John even hints at space by saying God "is to come" (there must be somewhere to come to if God is coming there). While it may be possible to glimpse God's glory filling the earth here, John masks this for now because he is not going to tell his audience that God's glory fills the earth; he is going to show them. For now, the vision of God's glory remains in the heavenly sanctuary.

In this vision of the heavenly temple, worship cascades outwards, even as it is directed inwards toward the one seated on the throne, and so, the second and third acts of worship are spurred on by the first. The four living creatures discern the holiness of God and articulate it in "glory, honor, and thanks" (Rev 4:9). In their turn, the twenty-four elders discern the holiness of God and also realize

16 This article is based on a longer work by the same author. The longer work provides more context and analysis on the temple imagery in Revelation. For access to this work, please contact the author at the email address listed on the title page.

something about themselves; thus, they cast down their crowns.¹⁷ Through witnessing the worship of the four living creatures, and in their own worship, the twenty-four elders interpret who they are in the light of who God is, and then they go on to elaborate God's praise. In their praise, the twenty-four elders bring God's creative actions into focus. As was discussed in the house-of-the-god theme, a god's creative actions are also proof of their authority to rule. So, the twenty-four elders make it known that God is the one who is worthy to be seated upon the throne in the heavenly temple, the one whose rule supersedes their own.

As chapter 4 ends, the lens of temple theology leaves one question asked but unanswered: what of the earth? The setup in chapter 4, which includes numerous temple symbols and clear links to the "house-of-the-god" theme, would lead readers to expect some commentary on the relationship between heaven and earth. But, the four living creatures have left out the line from Isaiah 6:3—"the whole earth is full of His glory." Osborne (2002, 237) says this line is missing because the earth is, instead, "full of abominations," and so where there should be a link between heaven and earth, a divide exists instead. If chapter 4 existed alone, then Osborne may be right. However, chapters 4 and 5 work together (Stuckenbruck 2011, 235), and the glory of God filling the whole earth is the business of chapter 5.

3.2. Chapter 5 Analysis

John's vision has saved the introduction of the "link between heaven and earth" to coincide with the introduction of Jesus. When the strong angel asks who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals, no one is found in heaven, earth, or the underworld. For the moment, the action remains in the sanctuary, but the scope of the vision has now broadened to all creation.

The solution to the problem of the scroll is the Lamb, who is now central to the scene.¹⁸ The Lamb brings the connection between heaven and earth into sharp focus, for the Lamb has "seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). In chapter 4, the seven spirits of God were depicted as lamps burning before the heavenly throne; now they are sent upon the earth through the Lamb. Seven lamps, seven eyes roaming the earth, and the spirits of God would remind John's audience of Zechariah 4, where all of these same elements are present as prophetic encouragement in the rebuilding of the temple. Furthermore, the seven horns on the Lamb likely signify his power

17 Koester (2017, 111) says the gesture of casting crowns before the throne "comes from Greco-Roman practice, where delegations of people would give gold laurel wreaths to a ruler in recognition of his authority."

18 The Lamb is central both literally and theologically: Davis 1986, 43; Mounce 1998, 134; Bauckham 1993, 64.

and victory,¹⁹ which are prerequisites to establishing a temple and ordering the cosmos. Just as God was praised for his creation in chapter 4, it seems the Lamb may be involved in creation as well.

After falling down in worship before the Lamb, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders begin the first ring of a three-tiered, expanding circle of worship. They “sing a new song,” which is a well-used phrase in the Psalms. In each Psalm in which the phrase appears, the “new song” tells of the salvation or rescue of God.²⁰ The new song in Revelation 5 similarly tells of how the Lamb redeemed a people for God with his blood. These new people are “from every tribe, language, people, and nation,” but these dividing lines are reorganized by the Lamb so that they are made into “a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.” The first circle of worship proclaims the Lamb’s new creation. The Lamb creates by his blood—by redemption. He makes a kingdom and appoints humans as priestly rulers to populate it.

The second ring of worshippers appears in verses 11-12. They are located “around the throne and the living creatures and the elders.” Their sheer number and comparatively generic identity of “angels” indicate that the circle of worship has expanded to the broader heavens. After the praise of the angels, the worship expands again. The third ring of worship is all of creation, every created thing in heaven, earth, under the earth, or on the sea.

With this third ring of worship, the praise of all creation draws the familiar three-part shape of a new temple. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Jerusalem temple and many other holy places/items where God and humans dwelled together were structured in three parts (Beale 2020, 32-33). Beale says these three parts of the earthly temple also correspond to the cosmos: the outer court, where humanity dwelt; the holy place, the part of heaven that could be seen from earth; and the holy of holies, where God was (which is also the pattern seen in the worship of chapter 5) (Beale 2020, 32). Just as the earthly temple reflected the whole cosmos, so now John’s vision of the cosmos resembles a temple, and God’s glory fills all the earth in the praise of every created thing. The Lamb fulfills the connection between heaven and earth that began in chapter 4, and from his place at the center of the cosmos, he shapes a new creation—a shape drawn in worship.

4. Application

The study of worship is dominated by questions of *what* and *who*. What is (and is not) worship? Who can (or should) be worshipped? This makes sense. For a

19 Gorman 2011, 122; Bauckham 1993, 112. Or compare with the Psalms. Cf. Ps 18:2; 75:4-5, 11; 89:17, 24; 92:10; 112:9; 132:17; 148:14.

20 See Ps 33; 40; 96; 98; 144; 149; and also, Isa 42.

worshipping community, “what and who” are the substance and source of their activity, and the practice(s) of worship and the object(s) of worship will always be of great importance. But there is another, less-asked question: why? For those new to (or on the fringes of) religious life, there is a why barring the way to the what (why do we do these things that we call worship?) and a why that blocks the view of the who (why would God ask us to worship him?). Paying greater attention to the whys of worship can lead those who struggle with it to a renewed vigor in their worship of God, and it can lead those familiar with worship to a deeper appreciation for it. Based on the analysis of worship and temple theology in Revelation 4 and 5 above, this study offers three applications for Christian worship, with the hope that all Christians will have a stronger sense of why we worship.

First, and perhaps most obviously, Christian worship should mold us in the identity of Jesus. This idea is not unique to Revelation, but Revelation’s presentation of it through temple theology makes it more vivid and distinct than anywhere else in the New Testament.²¹ In chapters 4 and 5, the Lamb’s act of redemptive creation begins the founding of a new temple, a new cosmos. Because of this, the Lamb takes his place at the center of the cosmos, seated on the throne alongside God. In all that follows, worship recognizes and participates in this new, Christ-centered world. As N. T. Wright (2017) puts it, worship is both a “sign and means of new creation.” We know we live in the kingdom of God and his Christ as we worship. We become “a kingdom of priests to our God” as we worship. We are changed as we worship. When Jesus takes his place at the center of the world, the world is different, and we are different. To worship God is to live in that new world, a world where Christ is king.

We can also flip this first point around to reveal not only how Jesus shapes us in worship, but also that our idolatry shapes us. If worship has a function (if worship *does something*), then we can draw a line from the effects of our worship to the one(s) we are worshipping. The connection between temple theology and worship makes these observations more accurate by directing us to particular categories of measurement: how we view space, how we view time, and how we view human identity. This can be a particularly useful tool, since, in the modern West, where shrines and temples are relatively rare, it can be easy to assume that we do not have much opportunity to worship another god. However, careful examination of moments when our sense of the world and other people changes can reveal our worship of something other than God. James K. A. Smith (2009,10) has done extensive work on unveiling how modern environments—including supposedly secular places like malls, stadiums, and universities—shape our sense of self and

21 How Jesus relates to worship is something that Dunn explores throughout *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus: The New Testament Evidence*. In comparison to the rest of the New Testament, Dunn describes Revelation as “uninhibited” in how it treats Jesus’s relationship to Christian worship (2010, 130).

the cosmos by getting us to worship, whether we realize it or not. If we follow the trail of our changing sense of the cosmos and our place within it, we might find that something as mundane as road rage could become eerily similar to a hymn to an unknown god.

Second, the temple of God reaches the earth in the shape of worship. Chapter 4 impresses its readers with the vision of the heavenly temple, but it also leaves those who know their temple theology nervously waiting for the God who “is to come.” In chapter 5, the missing line from Isaiah 6—“the whole earth is full of His glory”—manifests in the three-tiered (i.e., temple-shaped) worship professed by all creation. Much of the Revelation remains, and much of what is to come does not give the impression that the earth is full of God’s glory; however, chapters 4 and 5 are foundational for all that follows.²² If chapters 4 and 5 are only the foundation (and not the fulfillment) of the temple-city established in chapter 21, then the allusions to Zechariah 4 should remind readers of God’s challenge in that text to not show contempt “for the day of small things” (Zech 4:10). The foundation is the promise of the house, and so the worship of all creation is the promise of the New Jerusalem. Likewise, modern-day Christians should not underestimate the God-given power of their worship. The people of the ANE viewed worship as the glue holding society together, and Revelation 4 and 5 present Christian worship as something like the mortar between the bricks of the New Jerusalem. This perspective lifts up worship as a creative act. What Christians build now in their worship is (and will be) how heaven dwells on earth, and earthly worship is a part of God’s purpose to shape the cosmos into a place where God and humans can dwell together. If this is so, Christians should be more ambitious about what they can accomplish with their worship. If a congregation is seeking to evangelize, educate, heal, or bring peace to their broader community, then these chapters of Revelation should inspire them to use worship as a tool to accomplish those goals.

Third, worship connects those who worship to all other worshippers and, ultimately, to the source of worship. The worship of chapters 4 and 5 is antiphonal (Mounce 1998, 137). It begins around the heavenly throne and extends to the farthest reaches of the earth, the underworld, and the sea, but it also finds its way back up, all the way to the heavenly throne, where those closest to the throne hear it and initiate the cycle of worship anew (e.g. Rev 5:14). Revelation presents worship not as transactional, but deeply relational. It passes from one unique group to another, growing all the time, until it returns to where it began. At every stop along the way, worship gives something to those who witness it, and it carries on something from those who respond to it. As it does so, worship facilitates the traffic across time, space, and identity that defines what it means for heaven

22 Chapters 4 and 5 “are programmatic” (Stuckenbruck 2011, 235), “set the stage” (Mounce 1998, 139), “are foundational” (Bauckham 1993, 40), are an introductory summons (Keener 2000, 221), and are “the central and centering vision” (Gorman 2011, 47).

and earth to be linked according to temple theology. Therefore, one of the most powerful reasons to worship is because of its ability to bind God's people together. Furthermore, one of the most powerful ways to interact with worship is to listen and respond to it. As Christians share their worship across individual and congregational divides, and as each individual and congregation responds and builds upon what they witness in their own unique way, they replay the pattern of worship that brought the glory of God to earth in Revelation 4 and 5. It is no wonder then that when the people of God gather together, they find it most natural—most powerful—not to explain the words of Revelation 4 and 5, but to repeat them, to answer Revelation's vision of the temple in localized, cosmic continuity: that is, in worship.

Conclusion

Revelation offers an experience as much as it offers words to read. When someone reads Revelation 4 and 5, they step into a vision of worship that was recorded as an act of worship, which also hopes to inspire worship. If there is any passage through which Christians might better understand their own worship, this is certainly one of them. This study claims that Revelation 4 and 5 says much of what it wants to say through the paradigm of temple theology, and when the worship of the God of Jesus Christ meets the hope of the new, world-encompassing temple, worship is revealed as a gift and a tool. It makes its way down from the very throne of God to earth, linking the two spaces together, and it allows worshippers to participate in the coming new creation in the present, bridging today and the day to come. Most of all, worship affirms to Christians who they are, turning their vision of the cosmos toward the God who is worthy of worship.

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Zachary Shaffer

**Ustoličen u štovanju: Razumijevanje funkcija štovanja
kroz prizmu teologije hrama u Otkrivenju 4 i 5**

Sažetak

Dok se mnogi znanstveni radovi usredotočuju na objekt(e) štovanja u Otkrivenju, u ovome članku razmatraju se funkcije štovanja u 4. i 5. poglavlju Otkrivenja, njihova povezanost s teologijom hrama te način na koji takvo štovanje doprinosi izgradnji svijeta. Polazeći od pregleda različitih drevnih bliskoistočnih kultura, najprije se definira značenje teologije hrama. Potom se promatra štovanje u odnosu na teologiju hrama te se naglašava njegova funkcija identifikacije i orijentacije. Nadalje, kroz prizmu teologije hrama analizira se i štovanje u Otkrivenju 4 i 5, a na temelju toga izvode se zaključci o njegovim funkcijama. Budući da štovanje ima ulogu u ostvarenju vizije prema kojoj će cijeli svijet jednoga dana postati Božji hram, ono se može razumjeti kao čin stvaranja koji odjekuje iz samog Božjeg prijestolja.