

Was Jesus Worshipped
in the New Testament
and the Early Church?

by

Dr Trevor R Allin

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Greek text

Because of the large numbers of quotations from the Biblical text, some of them quite long, it has been decided to give the full Greek text in the footnotes, repeating only key words, with their transliterations and translations, in the main body of the text.

Transliterations and Translations

Transliterations into English letters give an approximation of how the words are pronounced. In the transliterations, the symbol ē indicates a Greek “long e” and the symbol ō indicates a “long o”. Translations are frequently by the author, with the aim of producing an English text that is as close to the Greek as possible, without regard to stylistic considerations. Quotations are sometimes also given from well-known and respected published translations.

– The author

About the Author

Dr Trevor R Allin graduated from the University of Leeds with a 1st Class Honours degree in Phonetics, French, Spanish and Philosophy and History of Religion. Following studies in linguistics, he undertook original research on a South American indigenous language, for which purpose he lived within the indigenous community and studied the language with native speakers over a period of more than a year. The University of St Andrews subsequently awarded him a Ph.D. for his thesis “A Grammar of Resígaro”.

For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in Spain on the important early Greek manuscript of the Bible, Codex Sinaiticus.

¹ Viladecavalls (Barcelona): Editorial CLIE, 2019

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

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Introduction

Jesus said that humanity should “honour the Son, just as they honour the Father” (John 5:23).³ This implies that he was a worthy object of worship.

One particular Greek word in the Biblical text is normally translated “worship”. It is the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō]. This word occurs in 231 different verses of the canonical Biblical text, in 38 different forms and a total of 245 times.⁴ (Different forms can be the past or future of the verb (for instance, “he worshipped” or “you shall worship”), the singular or plural of the verb (for example, “he worshipped” or “they worshipped”), the noun derived from the verb (“worshipper” or “worshippers”), etc.)

Just one English-language version of the Bible (almost!) never translates this word as “worship” when the sentence is about Christ. It is the “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, produced by the Jehovah’s Witnesses⁵, who say that Christ is the Archangel Michael and that he must never be worshipped. In this article we will not look at this bizarre doctrine, but we will dedicate a large part of the article to a study of the Greek word προσκυνέω [proskunéō]:

- What did it mean in the ancient (“secular”) Greek-speaking world?
- What did it mean to the Jews before and at the time of Christ?
- What did it mean when it was used in the Old Testament?
- What did it mean to Christ himself?
- What did it mean to the early church?
- What did it mean when it was used in the New Testament?

We have a large amount of reliable data in the form of ancient texts, both Biblical and extra-Biblical, so determining the meaning will not be difficult.

We are interested in the meaning of this Greek word because the New Testament was written in Greek (with a few rare quotations from Aramaic or Latin). Furthermore, the Jews themselves had translated their sacred Scriptures (the Old Testament), which were originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, into Greek. This translation was started in approximately the year 250 B.C. and was completed before the time of the birth of Christ. It was reportedly produced by seventy translators, in consequence of which it was given a name derived from the Latin word “seventy”: the “Septuagint”. In many publications, this translation is referred to by using the Roman numerals for “70”, LXX.

³ For a brief study of these words and their impact on the early church see Hurtado, Larry, W “Honoring the Son”, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018.

⁴ It also occurs 43 times in 40 different verses in the Old Testament Apocryphal or Deutero-canonical books, with 19 different forms attested. Adding these occurrences to the canonical books results in 288 occurrences in 39 forms in 271 verses. While many readers of this article may not wish to take occurrences in the Apocrypha into consideration, this does provide further evidence of the widespread use and meaning of this word amongst Jews who spoke and wrote Greek in the three centuries prior to the coming of Christ. However, with so many occurrences of this word in the canonical text of the Bible, we do not need to refer further in this article to the use of the word in the Apocrypha.

⁵ “The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, Copyright © 1961, 1984 by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

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1. The meaning of the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] in the ancient world: What the dictionaries say

We here look at the definitions of this word in all three leading dictionaries of Koiné (Biblical) and Classical Greek.

Liddell, Scott & Jones (“LSJ”)

In the abridged edition of their Lexicon of Classical Greek⁶, Liddell and Scott quote Plutarch, giving the definition as “*to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore*”. The full edition as revised by Jones gives the same definition while providing support for the definition by reference to many further writers of Classical Greek.⁷

BDAG

The “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament”⁸ by Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich (known as BDAG) defines the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] as follows:

“to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure ...

a to human beings, but by this act they are to be recognized as belonging to a superhuman realm ...
The Divinity of the Rom. Emperor

b to transcendent beings (God ...) Of various divinities

[α] **of deity in monotheistic cult (Christians, Judeans, Samaritans)**

[β] **of image worship in polytheistic cult ...**

[ε] **The risen Lord is esp. the object of worship: Mt 28:9, 17; Lk 24:52 ...**”

Here, space constraints have required a quotation of only parts of the BDAG definition, which occupies more than half a large page in small print. However, we represent fairly the definition given there. Readers desirous of seeing the full definition will find it on pages 882-883 of the work.

Montanari

Montanari quotes from the Classical Greek writer Sophocles, who was active for more than 50 years from approximately 470 B.C., and gives a historical meaning of “to greet with affection, to embrace”. He then and shows that the meaning developed to become “to adore, to venerate ... τοῦς θεοῦς” (the gods).⁹

This makes the important point that the meanings of words can develop and change over time. Thus, the word initially meant “to greet with affection”, in approximately the 8th century BC, but the meaning developed over the centuries to mean “to show respect to a human being in a position of authority”, finally becoming understood principally as meaning “to adore or venerate the gods”.

We next need to understand the meaning that this Greek word had for the Jewish people, both in the centuries prior to the coming of Christ and at the beginning of Christianity.

⁶ Liddell, H. G. & Scott, R, “A Greek-English Lexicon” (Abridged), accessed electronically via BibleWorks 10.

⁷ Liddell, H. G. & Scott, R. “A Greek-English Lexicon revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones et.al.”, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968 (1976 reprint), p. 1518.

⁸ Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature”, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 3rd edition, 2000

⁹ Montanari, F, “The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek, English Edition”, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015, pp. 1816-1817

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2. προσκυνέω [proskunéō]: What the word meant to the Jews

In the Septuagint, the Greek word used by the Jews to express the concept of worship was this same word: προσκυνέω [proskunéō].

For instance, in 2 Chronicles 29:30 we read:

“King Hezekiah and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of the seer Asaph. They sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped (προσεκύνησαν [prosekúnēsan]).” (NRSV)^{10,11}

The Hebrew word translated “worshipped” is פִּיִּישָׁהוּ (pronounced wayyīšah^awū) and the Greek word that the Septuagint uses for this is προσεκύνησαν (pronounced prosekúnēsan). Even readers with no knowledge of Koiné Greek may be able to recognise that this word is in some way related to the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] that we have given above.¹²

It is clear that here the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated “worshipped” mean more than just to fall down as a sign of respect, as the complete phrase says that they “fell down and προσεκύνησαν [prosekúnēsan]”. Could the Greek text (or the Hebrew from which it was translated) possibly be saying “they fell down and fell down”? If this were the case, the second verb would be redundant, and would not be there; the sentence would end with the verb “they fell down” (ἔπεσον [épeson]). The word ἔπεσον [épeson], which we see here, is the irregular indicative aorist active 3rd person plural form of the verb πίπτω [piptō].

In fact, the word “worship” is frequently preceded by this verb that means “fall down”, an indication that the falling down was the physical posture while the worship was the inward attitude, the motivation and purpose of falling down. Howe says, “these two words express the physical action and the spiritual action, falling down followed by worship.”¹³

There are many other examples of the use of these two verbs together in the Old Testament, both in the Hebrew/Aramaic original and in the Septuagint Greek translation. We will look at just one other passage, Daniel 3:4-6, where the phrase occurs twice. This section of Daniel is written in Aramaic, and the word used for “worship” is וַיִּדְגְּדוּ (pronounced w^aticg^aduwn). Holladay¹⁴ defines this as “pay homage to God and idols”. We note that this definition states that this is an action that is performed “to God” or to “idols”, i.e., the false gods of the nations. This was not a mere polite bow to one’s host or to a person in authority. This word was used for the action performed by worshippers to God or to their god.

Here is the text:

“the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship (πεσόντες προσκυνήσατε [pesóntes proskunēsatē]) the golden statue that

¹⁰ וַיִּאמְרוּ וַיִּקְרְאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים לְלִוִּים לְהִלָּל לַיהוָה בְּדִבְרֵי דָוִד וְאָמְרוּ הַחֲזִק וַיְהִי לֵלֵל עַד-לְשִׁמְחָהּ וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ: פ

¹¹ καὶ εἶπεν Ἐζεκιᾶς ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῖς Λευίταις ὑμνεῖν τὸν κύριον ἐν λόγοις Δαυὶδ καὶ Ἀσαφ τοῦ προφήτου καὶ ὕμνου ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ καὶ ἔπεσον καὶ προσεκύνησαν

¹² It is the third person plural of the indicative aorist active form of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō].

¹³ Thomas A Howe, “Bias in New Testament Translations?”, 2010, Charlotte, NC, Solomon’s Razor Publishing, p. 47. Dr Howe is an established academic who has served on the faculty of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary since 1993.

In 2015 a new book by Dr Howe on the same theme was published: “The Deity of Christ in Modern Translations”. This book is available from Amazon (and possibly elsewhere). It appears to be a revised and slightly abbreviated version of the earlier book.

¹⁴ Holladay, “Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament”, accessed via BibleWorks 10.

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King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship (πεσὼν προσκυνήση [pesōn proskunēsē]) shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.” (Daniel 3:4-6, NRSV)^{15,16}

Again we note that when the Jews translated this into Greek, they used the same Greek verb προσκυνέω [proskunēō], demonstrating that for them this was the word that needed to be used to describe a reverential action to God or to an idol representing a pagan god. The very fact that the three young Hebrew men refused to perform this action, even when threatened with death, indicates that they considered that the action of προσκυνέω [proskunēō] should only be performed to God, and that to do this to a pagan god or an idol would be a betrayal of their faith in the one true God.

Both the original writer of the Aramaic text and the translator into Greek also preceded this verb describing the act of worship with the verb that describes the physical falling down.

Once again, these examples show clearly that προσκυνέω [proskunēō] did not just mean “to fall down” or “to bow down” as a polite gesture required by the culture for social encounters between human beings of different ranks.

Thus it is clear that, since hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, the Jews had understood the word προσκυνέω [proskunēō] as referring to an action that was different from bowing down as a gesture of respect to someone. It referred to a reverential action that Jews could only render to God. The most obvious English word for this is “worship”.

A few centuries later, we see exactly the same use of language when the Wise Men found Jesus. We must bear in mind that Matthew’s gospel, like all the gospels, was written by a devout Jew, using the language which had become the common daily language of many Jews, Koine Greek.

“And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him (πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν [pesóntes prosekúnēsan]) and having opened their treasure chests they presented gifts to him, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”^{17,18}

We see exactly the same two verbs for falling down and worshipping as in the Old Testament passages given above. Could it really be claimed that the correct translation should be “falling down, they bowed down”? Is it even physically possible to bow down when one has already fallen to the ground? It is clear that what we see is a reverential attitude of adoration. They had, after all, seen an astonishing sign in the heavens, had prepared extraordinary gifts and had then travelled a

¹⁵ וְכִשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בָּרָא אֶת-הַמִּצְבֵּי הַכְּתוּבִים אֵלָיו וְכִשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בָּרָא אֶת-הַמִּצְבֵּי הַכְּתוּבִים אֵלָיו וְכִשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בָּרָא אֶת-הַמִּצְבֵּי הַכְּתוּבִים אֵלָיו וְכִשְׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בָּרָא אֶת-הַמִּצְבֵּי הַכְּתוּבִים אֵלָיו

¹⁶ καὶ ὁ κήρυξ ἐκήρυξε τοῖς ὄχλοις ὑμῖν παραγγέλλεται ἔθνη καὶ χῶραι λαοὶ καὶ γλῶσσαι ⁵ ὅταν ἀκούσητε τῆς φωνῆς τῆς σάλπιγγος σύριγγος καὶ κιθάρας σαμβύκης καὶ ψαλτηρίου συμφωνίας καὶ παντὸς γένους μουσικῶν πεσόντες προσκυνήσατε τῇ εἰκόνι τῇ χρυσεῇ ἣν ἔστησε Ναβουχοδονοσορ βασιλεὺς ⁶ καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἂν μὴ πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃ ἐμβαλοῦσιν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρὸς τὴν καιομένην

There are two extant Greek translations of the text of Daniel. This is the Old Greek text, which is the translation that would have been known at the time of Christ. The other Greek translation was made by Theodotion in about 150 AD, according to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodotion> consulted on 18.8.20. It gained prominence “by the first or second century CE”, according to R. Timothy McLay in Pietersma, Albert & Wright, Benjamin J., Editors, “A New English Translation of the Septuagint”, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 991.

¹⁷ Translation by the author of this article. The NIB has “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

¹⁸ καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἶδον τὸ παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν.

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great distance in order to pay reverential veneration to this exceptional baby whom they described as “born king of the Jews”. (Matthew 2:2)

3. προσκυνέω [proskunéō]: What the word meant to Christ

Just as the Jews had understood the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] as referring to an action that they could render only to God, Christ repeated this restriction when he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, which is recorded in Matthew chapter 4.

The devil said to Christ:

““All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship (πεσὼν προσκυνήσης [pesōn proskunēsēs]) me.”” (Matthew 4:9, NRSV)¹⁹

Here – just as in the Septuagint passages written in Greek several centuries earlier – we see that the verb πίπτω [piptō] is used with its unique meaning of “falling down”²⁰, while προσκυνέω [proskunéō] means something deeper with a profound religious meaning of veneration or adoration.

Christ’s answer makes this clear:

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go away, Satan! For it is written ‘You shall worship (προσκυνήσεις [proskunēseis]) the Lord your God and him only you shall serve.’”²¹ (Matthew 4:10)

This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13 but we note that on this occasion Christ does not quote from the Septuagint translation, which says “You shall fear the Lord your God”²², itself a good translation of the Hebrew. However, Christ changes the wording in his response to Satan, choosing the Greek verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō], “worship”, the verb that had been used by Satan.

| |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Christ thus gives a definition of προσκυνέω [proskunéō]: <i>it is something that may only be done to God.</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

This word is also repeatedly used by Christ in John’s gospel chapter 4. For reasons of space, we here reproduce just two verses, but the conversation is clearly about worship of God:

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers (προσκυνηταὶ [proskunētai]) will worship (προσκυνήσουσιν [proskunēsousin]) the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship (προσκυνοῦντας [proskunountas]) him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship (προσκυνοῦντας [proskunountas]) him must worship (προσκυνεῖν [proskunein]) in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24, NRSV)²³

Five times in these two verses, various forms of the same word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] are used. In the Jehovah’s Witness Version every one of them is translated with suitable forms of the word “worship”. Here again Christ says that προσκυνέω [proskunéō] is something that must be performed to God. This makes it clear that the default meaning of the word is “to worship”.

¹⁹ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσης μοι.

²⁰ πεσὼν [pesōn] is the aorist active nominative masculine singular participle from πίπτω

²¹ Translation by the author of this article. τότε λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ὕπαγε, σατανᾶ· γέγραπται γάρ· κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις. The Greek here uses the future of the verb with an imperative meaning.

²² κύριον τὸν θεόν σου φοβηθήσῃ καὶ αὐτῷ λατρεύσεις

²³ ἀλλ’ ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτε οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ· καὶ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοιοῦτους ζητεῖ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτόν. ²⁴ πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτόν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν.

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4. προσκυνέω [proskunēō] and the Early Church

Christ had merely re-emphasised the understanding of the word προσκυνέω [proskunēō] that had been held by the Jews for hundreds of years. It is clear that for the Jews, whoever accepts someone performing *this action* to them is accepting a homage that may only be given to God. We see this immediately in the early church. In Acts chapter 10, when Peter neared the house of the God-fearing Gentile Cornelius, we read:

“When Peter was about to enter [the city of Caesarea], Cornelius, having gone out to meet him, fell down at his feet and worshipped him (προσεκύνησεν [prosekunēsen]).” (Acts 10:25)²⁴ The NIB renders this “fell at his feet in reverence”, while the NRSV has “falling at his feet, worshipped him.”

Whether we use the word “reverence” or “worship”, it describes an action that Jews permitted to be performed only to God. This becomes clear in Peter’s response, which was swift and stern:

“But Peter raised him up, saying “Stand up; I too myself am a human being.” (Acts 10:26)²⁵

Thus it is clear that for both Jews and the Christians of the first century, it was forbidden to perform this action to any human being. For Christ, too, it was an action that should only be performed to God – yet, as we shall see shortly, Christ accepted it when people worshipped him.

5. προσκυνέω [proskunēō] and Angels

Not only was it forbidden to worship human beings, it was even forbidden to worship angels, in spite of the fact that these are celestial beings sent from God.

Thus we see in Revelation chapter 19 that the writer John fell down at the angel’s feet to worship him:

“Then I fell down at his feet to worship (προσκυνῆσαι [proskunēsai]) him.” (Revelation 19:10a, NRSV)²⁶

The angel responded with a severe reprimand:

“but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship (προσκύνησον [proskunēson]) God!” (Revelation 19:10b, NRSV)²⁷ The verb is in the imperative form. That is to say, it is a command: the action of this verb must only be performed to God.

So overwhelmed was John by his experience “in the spirit” (Rev 1:10 and 4:2) that he subsequently again fell down/prostrated himself to worship the angel:

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship (προσκυνῆσαι [proskunēsai]) at the feet of the angel who showed them to me.” (Revelation 22:8, NRSV)²⁸

²⁴ Translation by the author. Ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν τὸν Πέτρον, συναντήσας αὐτῷ ὁ Κορινθίος πεσὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας προσεκύνησεν.

²⁵ Translation by the author. ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν λέγων· ἀνάστηθι· καὶ ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπός εἰμι. The NIB has: “But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself.’”

²⁶ καὶ ἔπεσα ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ.

²⁷ καὶ λέγει μοι· ὄρα μή· σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ· τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.

²⁸ Καγὼ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα. καὶ ὅτε ἤκουσα καὶ ἔβλεψα, ἔπεσα προσκυνῆσαι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ δεικνύοντός μοι ταῦτα.

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We note that John first fell down and then intended to worship, the combination of actions and words that we have seen since Old Testament times.

The harshness of the angel's rebuke is uncompromising:

“but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"(τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον [tō theō proskúnēson])” (Revelation 22:9, NRSV)²⁹ Again, the verb is in the imperative (command) form: the action of this verb *should only be performed to God*.

It is therefore clear that since centuries before the birth of the church, for the Jewish people the Greek word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] described a reverential action that *it was only permitted to perform to God*. The meaning of this word is thus most appropriately translated by the English word “worship”.

We have thus seen that:

1. Performing the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] to pagan gods was forbidden to the Jewish people, and had been for centuries.
2. Performing the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] to human beings – no matter how exalted – was forbidden, and had been for centuries.
3. Performing the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] to Satan was forbidden.
4. Performing the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] to angels in heaven was forbidden.
5. Christ prescribed that the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō] could only be rendered to God.

We have used this convoluted phrase (performing the action of the verb προσκυνέω [proskunéō]) because of the objections of the Jehovah's Witnesses to translating this word as “worship” – on some occasions!³⁰ But worship is what this word describes: ascribing worth to the recipient of this action, saying that he is worthy of praise and adoration.

6. The Receipt of Worship by Christ

In the light of this background, the reaction of Christ when he was the object of this worship is nothing less than astounding. In contrast to the Apostle Peter and in contrast to the angel who was guiding John in heaven, we see a totally different reaction from Christ when people performed this action to him. For instance, in John 9 we read of a man who had been blind from birth, who was healed by Jesus. “Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped (προσεκύνησεν [prosekúnēsen]) him.” (John 9:38, NIB)³¹

Did Christ reprimand this man? No – in contrast with the Apostle Peter in the book of Acts and in contrast with the angel in heaven – Christ accepted this action that he himself had said should only be performed to God, thus giving one of the earliest indications of his deity.

There are many other examples in the New Testament and we will give just a few of them.

In Matthew 14, after Christ had walked on the water to come to his disciples as they struggled in their boat in the storm, we read:

²⁹καὶ λέγει μοι· ὄρα μή· σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.

³⁰ We shall look at the inconsistencies in their translation of this word later in this article.

³¹ ὁ δὲ ἔφη· πιστεύω, κύριε· καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ.

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“Then those who were in the boat worshipped (προσεκύνησαν [prosekúnēsan]) him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'” (Matthew 14:33, NIB)³²

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped (προσεκύνησαν [prosekúnēsan]) him; but some doubted.” (Matthew 28:16-17, NIB)³³

This was also the action that was performed by the Apostle Thomas, who had refused to believe that Christ had been raised from the dead, when he finally found himself face-to-face with the risen Christ:

“Then Thomas responded and said to him, “My Lord and my God!”” (John 20:28)³⁴

Here we do not have the word προσκυνέω [“proskunēō”] in the text, but Thomas is doing what worship is: ascribing divine worth to Christ, saying that he is worthy, and that he is Lord and God.

As in the previous incidents referred to above, Christ did not reprimand Thomas. He didn't say (like Peter), “Don't do this! I too myself am only a man!” Nor did he say (like the angel in heaven in the book of Revelation), “Don't do this! I am only an angel, your fellow-servant of God; worship God!”

This is particularly significant with reference to the Jehovah's Witness teaching that – according to them! – Christ is in fact an angel. It demonstrates at one stroke that this strange sectarian doctrine, which has no basis in the Bible, cannot be true.

Indeed, recognising that Christ was worshipped in the New Testament is not dependent on the translation of just one word. We now look briefly at four other aspects of the worship of Christ in the New Testament:

- the worship of Christ in heaven
- the worship of Christ in the early church
- prayer to Christ
- the use of Nomina Sacra, sacred names, in the text of the New Testament.

7. The Worship of Christ in Heaven

In chapter four of the book of Revelation the writer of the book, John, is taken to see events in heaven. He describes a throne in heaven and One who is seated on it. In verses 10 and 11 we read:

“The twenty-four elders will fall down before the seated upon the throne and will worship the one who lives forever and ever. And they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ ‘You are worthy our Lord and God to receive the glory and the honour and the power, because you created all things and by your will they were created.’” (Revelation 4:10-11)³⁵

We notice four details:

³² οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες· ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ.

³³ Οἱ δὲ ἕνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ¹⁷ καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν.

³⁴ Translation by the present author. ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.

³⁵ Translation by the author. πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου λέγοντες· ¹¹ ἄξιός εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

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- i) They will fall down (πεσοῦνται [pesountai]).
- ii) They will worship (προσκυνήσουσιν [proskunēsousin]).
- iii) They address him as “Oh Lord our God”, a remarkable echo of Thomas’s words to Christ in John 20:28 – or perhaps it is Thomas’s words to Christ that are an echo of the worship of God in heaven!
- iv) They declare that he is “worthy” (ἄξιος [áxios]), to receive three things: glory, honour and power, and they then give reasons why he is worthy.

This is undisputedly the worship of God in heaven, repeating the oft-used formula of falling down and worshipping, as seen both in the Old Testament and in the New. The explanation of what they say is neither more nor less than a description of worship.

We note that the NWT uses the word “worship” and adds to the text the word “Jehovah”, although no form of the word Yahweh is in the Greek text.³⁶ Nevertheless, by this the Jehovah’s Witnesses do acknowledge that this is a description of the worship of God in heaven.

The same scene in heaven continues in the next chapter of the book of Revelation. In chapter 5, the focus shifts to “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (verse 5), who is next described as “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain” (verse 6).³⁷ This and the following words make it indisputably clear that this is Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 says, “the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down (ἔπεσαν [épesan]) before the Lamb” (NIB)³⁸

Next they sang to the Lamb:

“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy (ἄξιος εἶ [áxios ei]) to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.’” (Revelation 5:9, NIB)³⁹

This scene is a clear parallel with the worship of God in chapter 4, but here the object of the worship is Jesus Christ, who is described as “worthy”, the same word that was used in the description of the worship of God in the previous chapter. But the description does not stop here.

Verse 11 gives a detailed description of those who are worshipping Christ:

“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11, NRSV)⁴⁰

The detail here is greater than in the description of the worship of God in the previous chapter. This is clearly no minor event that happens in a corner somewhere. Next we see what they are singing:

“singing with loud voices, ‘Worthy is the Lamb (ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον [áxion estin to arnion]) who was slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.’” (Revelation 5:12)⁴¹

³⁶ We examine this in other articles on this website, for instance, “What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9? Should we call God “Jehovah”?”, here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf> and “God’s Sacred Name in the Bible”, here: http://livingwater-spain.com/Heb_in_LXX_MS.pdf

³⁷ Both of these quotations are from the NIB.

³⁸ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου

³⁹ καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες· ἄξιος εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους

⁴⁰ Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν κύκλω τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων

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For the second time in just three verses, Christ is described as “worthy”, the core element of worship, ascribing worth to the recipient of worship. Furthermore, whereas in Revelation 4:10-11 God is described as worthy to receive three things: glory, honour and power, by contrast, Christ is here described as worthy to receive seven things: power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. In a book where numbers are so important, none of this can be accidental, and it almost seems as though the purpose is to counter any claim that someone might make that Christ was somehow less worthy than God.

But the description of the worship of Christ in heaven does not stop here. In the next two verses there is a renewed emphasis on this worship:

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!’¹⁴ The four living creatures said, ‘Amen’, and the elders fell down and worshipped (προσεκύνησαν [prosekúnēsan]).” (Revelation 5:13-14, NIB)⁴²

We note the following details:

- i) Every living being is worshipping Christ.
- ii) The worship is described as being directed “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb”.
- iii) To both are ascribed four things: “praise and honour and glory and power”.
- iv) This is not a temporary action; it is “for ever and ever”.
- v) We are told that the elders “fell down”.
- vi) We are told that they “worshipped”.

So in this short passage Christ is twice described as “worthy” and in the third reference we are told that he is “worshipped”. Are we really supposed to think that the text says “and falling down they fell down”? Even the NWT can’t get out of this, and has to use the word “worship”, even though the objects of the worship are God (the Father) and the Lamb (Christ).

Richard Bauckham, a leading specialist in the text of the New Testament who has also published detailed studies of the Book of Revelation, writes:

“There can be no doubt that in [Revelation] 5:8-12 John portrays explicit divine worship paid to Christ: the parallels between 4:9-11 and 5:8-12 make this clear.”⁴³

Bauckham also quotes (on the same page) from two other authoritative works on the Book of Revelation:

Kiddle (on Revelation 5:11-12): “Nowhere else in the New Testament is Christ adored on such absolutely equal terms with the Godhead.”⁴⁴

Swete (on Revelation chapter 5): “This chapter is the most powerful statement of the divinity of Christ in the New Testament, and it receives its power from the praise of God the Creator which precedes it.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Translation by the author. λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

⁴² καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας· τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἄρνιῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. ¹⁴ καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἔλεγον· ἀμήν. καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν.

⁴³ Bauckham, Richard, “The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation”, London & New York: T & T Clark, 1993 and reprints, p. 137

According to Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Bauckham, accessed on 21.8.20, “Bauckham was, until 2007, the Professor of New Testament Studies and Bishop Wardlaw Professor in the University of St Andrews.”

⁴⁴ Kiddle, M., “The Revelation of St John”, MNTC, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940, p. 105

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Bauckham has also published a shorter book, “The Theology of the Book of Revelation”.⁴⁶ Of particular relevance to the present study is chapter 3, “The Lamb on the throne”.

8. The Worship of Christ in the Early Church

From the earliest written records, it is clear that Christ was worshipped by the first believers. Hurtado observes, “Christ-devotion is an utterly remarkable phenomenon ... It began amazingly early, and was already exhibiting signs of routinization by the time of the letters of Paul (i.e., by ca. 50 C.E.), which means that the origins of cultic veneration of Jesus have to be pushed well back into the first two decades of the Christian movement.”⁴⁷

Hurtado clarifies the sources and early date of Paul’s awareness of the worship of Jesus: “Paul’s own associations with Christian circles, which include important Jewish Christian figures such as Peter, James the brother of Jesus, Barnabas, and others, go back to his conversion, which is to be dated approximately 32-34, and so his acquaintance with beliefs and practices of Christian circles is both wide and extremely early.” (op. cit. p. 85, emphasis added)

Moreover, the evidence indicates that this worship of Christ as divine was universally accepted by the early Christian groups. Hurtado says, “Indeed, there is hardly any indication in Paul’s letters that he knew of any controversy or serious variance about this exalted place of Jesus among the various other Christian circles with which he was acquainted. In historical terms we may refer to a veritable “big bang”, an explosively rapid and impressively substantial christological development in the earliest stage of the Christian movement. ... the Pauline letters indicate that at an astonishingly early point basic convictions about Jesus that amount to treating him as divine had become widely shared in various Christian circles. ... Christ is treated as recipient of devotion with God and in ways that can be likened only to the worship of a deity.” (op. cit., p. 135, emphasis added)

So was this worship of Christ something that was introduced centuries later, as claimed by some? Was it imposed on Christianity by a “dominant faction” and against the existing practices of believers? Hurtado replies, “it is necessary to attribute the origins of the cultic reverence of Christ to Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking circles, and to the first years of the Christian movement (the 30s).” (op. cit., p. 136, emphasis added) That means, within not more than seven years of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Indeed, other evidence suggests that it was precisely this worship of Christ by the first believers that so incensed the pious Jew Saul and led to his violent persecution of the Christian believers. (Acts 8:3)⁴⁸

9. Prayer

In Old Testament Times, God told the people of Israel to pray to him. For instance, in Jeremiah 33:3 we read, “Call to me and I will answer you.” (NIV, NRSV) There are prayers to God throughout the Old Testament and its largest book, the Psalms, consists of prayers to God and praise of God.

⁴⁵ Swete, H.B., “The Apocalypse of St John”, London: Macmillan, 1907, p. 127

⁴⁶ Bauckham, R, “The Theology of the Book of Revelation” in the series “New Testament Theology”, Cambridge (U.K.): Cambridge University Press, 1993, 23rd printing 2015

⁴⁷ Hurtado, Larry W. “Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity”, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company 2003, p. 7, emphasis added

⁴⁸ On this, see Hurtado, 2003, p. 157. Relevant passages in the New Testament include Philippians 2:5-11 and Ephesians chapters 1 and 2.

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More than that, prayer to anyone other than God is ridiculed.⁴⁹ In Psalm 115 we read concerning the false gods of other nations,

“their idols are silver and gold,
made by the hands of men.
⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but they cannot see;
⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but they cannot smell;
⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel,
feet, but they cannot walk;
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.
⁸ Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.”
(Psalm 115:4-8, NIV⁵⁰)

In 1 Kings 18 (especially verses 25-39) we read of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Asherah, in which the key test is prayer that is answered by God. Elijah mocks the other prophets for calling to “gods” that cannot answer.

In the light of the centuries throughout which the principle of praying only to God had been impressed on the people of Israel, it is astounding that Jesus, a member of the Jewish nation, told his followers, all of whom at that time were Jews, not only to pray to the Father, but also to pray to him! In John 14:14 we read, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”⁵¹ (emphasis added) (NRSV: “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

In the earliest days of the church, we see that the believers prayed to Jesus. For example when Stephen was stoned to death by a mob, we read:

“While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”” When he had said this, he died.” (Acts 7:59-60, NRSV)⁵²

We also note that one of the earliest prayers of first century Christians was addressed to Christ: “Maranatha”, which means, “Come, Lord”. It is significant that this short prayer is in Aramaic, the language of many Jewish Christian believers in Palestine, but it was so well-known amongst believers in the middle of the first century that Paul could quote it to the Greek-speaking believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:22) without needing to translate it into Greek. Hurtado says:

“this ... appeal is addressed to the exalted Jesus. The *maranatha* expression is thus clearly evidence of corporate cultic devotion to Jesus in the Aramaic circles where the expression first emerged. ... the expression represents the cultic invocation of Jesus. For this shows that he was a

⁴⁹ We realise that Roman Catholicism encourages prayers to deceased believers who have subsequently been declared by the Roman Catholic Church to be “saints”. This goes against the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments and against the practice of orthodox Judaism and New Testament Christianity. We will not examine this practice further in this article but do emphasise that in the Bible, both Old Testament and New, valid prayer must be offered only to God, including to Christ!

⁵⁰ Equivalent to Psalm 113:12-16 in the Septuagint numbering

⁵¹ εἰάν τι αἰτήσητέ με ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐγὼ ποιήσω.

⁵² καὶ ἐλιθοβόλουν τὸν Στέφανον ἐπικαλούμενον καὶ λέγοντα· κύριε Ἰησοῦ, δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου. ⁶⁰ θεὸς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη.

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recipient of devotion in the worship gathering of Aramaic-speaking believers in the earliest decades of the Christian movement.”⁵³

The same prayer to Christ is also recorded in the Book of Revelation, just one verse before the end of the book, this time in Greek: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20, NRSV)⁵⁴

10. Nomina Sacra: the use of Sacred Names in the Text of the New Testament

“Nomina Sacra” was the (Latin) title given by the German writer Ludwig Traube in 1907⁵⁵ to describe a phenomenon in the physical form of certain special words in the text of the New Testament. For these “sacred” words, the word was written in a special abbreviated form, omitting many of the letters and adding a bar over the top of the word.

In the oldest manuscripts, this treatment was applied to certain “divine” words such as “God” and “Lord”. It is significant that in this list of divine words, “Lord” was also written in the “divine name” form of a *Nomen Sacrum* when it was applied to Christ, and the words “Jesus” and “Christ” were included in the list of divine names. Here are a few examples:

| English word | Greek word | Nomen Sacrum form | Example from Codex Sinaiticus |
|--------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| God | θεός | Θ̅C | Θ̅C |
| Lord | κύριος | Κ̅C | Κ̅C |
| Jesus | Ἰησοῦς | Ι̅C | Ι̅C |
| Christ | Χριστός | Χ̅C | Χ̅C |

Hurtado writes, “it is particularly striking that the earliest extant pattern was one in which key terms for Jesus and God were consistently given the *equivalent* scribal reverence.”⁵⁶

The above four names were the first ones written in the *Nomina Sacra* form in the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament, but in time other words were added, such as:

| | | | |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Son | υἱός | Υ̅C | Υ̅C |
| Saviour | σωτήρ | CΩP | CΩP |
| (Holy) Spirit | πνεῦμα | Π̅N̅A | Π̅N̅A |

Note that in accordance with the rules of Greek grammar, the forms of nouns can change. Thus, when θεός [theós, God] is in the accusative case (generally, the direct object of a verb or of certain prepositions) it becomes θεόν [theón]. Likewise, κύριος [kurios, Lord] becomes κύριον [kurion], etc. These forms, too, are written using the appropriate Nomen Sacrum form, following the patterns reproduced above.

The inclusion of words referring to Christ in the list of “divine words” is an extremely significant indication that Christ was considered by the writers of the New Testament to be divine (and thus worthy of being worshipped as God).

⁵³ Hurtado, Larry W., “Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity”, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p. 173, emphasis added. See also p. 110.

⁵⁴ ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ.

⁵⁵ Traube, L., “Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kurzung“, München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlag, 1907

⁵⁶ Hurtado, 2003, p. 627.

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11. προσκυνέω [“proskunéō”] and the Earliest Translations of the New Testament

The Jehovah’s Witness apologist Jason BeDuhn is determined to re-define the Greek word προσκυνέω [“proskunéō”] to match the meaning given to it (sometimes, but not always!) in the NWT, and claims that the translation “worship” “works its way into modern translations”⁵⁷. Such vague statements are so lacking in academic precision that they are difficult to evaluate. They also ignore historical facts, such as the translation of προσκυνέω [“proskunéō”] into the **Latin** word for worship, “adorabis”, in the Vulgate translation in the 4th century AD⁵⁸ – certainly not a “modern translation”.⁵⁹

Likewise, Howe points out that the word used in the early **Syriac** Peshitta translation of the New Testament has the meaning, “worship, adoration; the adoration of the Cross; idolatry; place of worship.”⁶⁰

12. προσκυνέω [proskunéō] and the Jehovah’s Witnesses

Elsewhere⁶¹ we have demonstrated that in their version of the Bible⁶² the Jehovah’s Witnesses change the translation of words when the normal meaning conflicts with their doctrines.

In a similar way, for the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō], which everyone else translates as “to worship” (the principal dictionary definition), the NWT *also* translates this word as “worship” throughout the New Testament – but with exceptions in only one case!

The **only** time that the NWT does **not** translate προσκυνέω [proskunéō] as “worship” is when it is applied to Jesus (e.g., Matthew 2:11, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:17.) They even translate it as “worship” when it is applied to the demonical dragon and to the beast, for instance, in Revelation 13:4). Only with Jesus do they not use “worship” to translate this word – in order to imply that Jesus is inferior to God (and, we may conclude, even inferior to the demonic dragon and beast in Revelation).

This clearly demonstrates that the wording of their version of the Bible is clearly driven by the doctrines of the sect, eliminating the true meaning of any Bible passage that shows the falseness of their dogmas.

The reader of the NWT will be unaware that exactly the same word in the original Greek text is translated as “worship” for God and even for Satan, but as the claimed lesser action “do obeisance” for Christ. The reader is thus led by this sectarian version of the Bible to believe that lesser status is accorded to Christ and that he is not worthy of worship. In order to reinforce this misleading impression, the Organization tells its members:

⁵⁷ BeDuhn, Jason, “Truth in Translation”, Lanham / New York / Oxford: University Press of America ®, 2003, p. 45.

See my review of this book here:

⁵⁸ cf Matthew 4:10. and Howe op cit p. 54. For the Vulgate, I refer to Bover and O’Callaghan, “Nuevo Testamento Trilingüe”, 2005, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos. This reproduces the *Neovulgata* text, 1974, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. In this verse, the wording of the Neovulgata is identical to the original, 4th century Vulgate text.

⁵⁹ See my review of BeDuhn’s book here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf> (page 44 in the edition consulted on 23.08.20).

⁶⁰ cf Howe, 2010, p 55. He informs his readers that the quotation is from “A compendious Syriac Dictionary”, 1990.

⁶¹ See, for example, “A Simple Test”, here: http://livingwater-spain.com/I_am_test.pdf consulted on 23.8.20.

⁶² The “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures” references as above

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- a) not to trust other translations, not to read them, and only to refer to them when instructed to do so in the publications and internal teaching materials of the Organization, and then only for a verse that has been specified;
- b) that the NWT is the only accurate translation of the Bible.

In their “Foreword” to the 1950 edition of the Organization’s New Testament, the “New World Bible Translation Committee” explained the principles that they claimed to have followed. The Jehovah’s Witnesses reprinted this Foreword in their 1969 “Kingdom Interlinear Translation”.⁶³ In this they state:

“Our endeavor all through has been to give as literal a translation as possible ... That way we can best meet the desire of those who are scrupulous for getting, as nearly as possible, word for word, the exact statement of the original. ...
“To each major word we have assigned one meaning and have held to that meaning as far as the context permitted.”⁶⁴

It is clear that in accord with the dogmas of the Organization, “the context permitted” προσκυνέω [proskunéō] to be translated as “worship” when applied to the Beast and the Dragon in the Book of Revelation, and to Satan anywhere in the Bible, but not to Christ!

In fact, “by error”, one usage of this word correctly translated as “worship” with reference to Christ did slip through in the NWT, so for Hebrews 1:6 the editions of the NWT up to at least 1969 had “let all God’s angels worship him”. When the Jehovah’s Witnesses spotted that the “him” in this verse means “**Christ**”, they deleted the word “worship” in subsequent editions of their New Testament and replaced it with the phrase that they reserve for Christ, “do obeisance”.

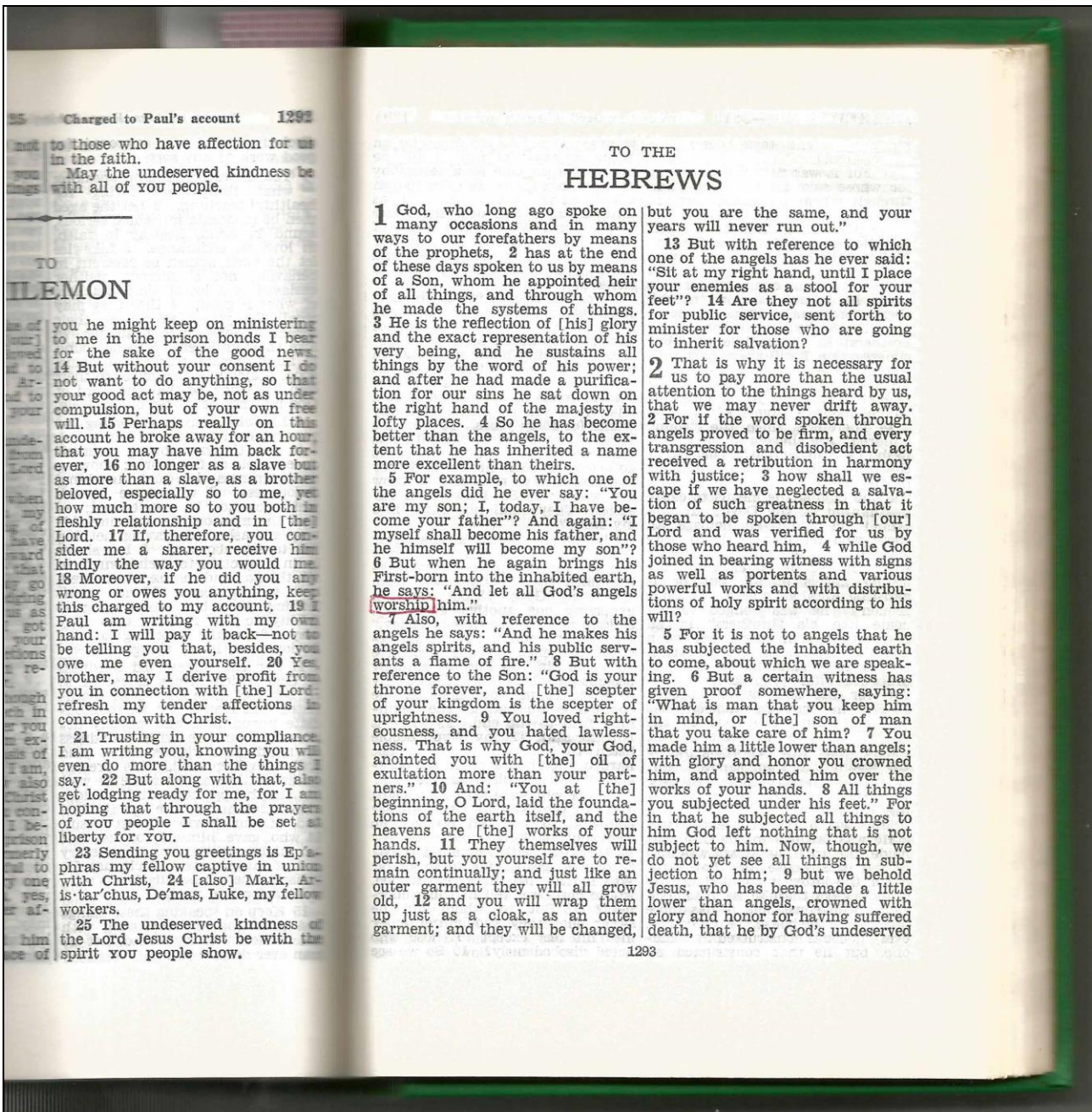
For those who do not know Greek, this demonstrates beyond all doubt that in the New Testament the Greek word for “worship” is indeed applied to Christ. This fact has been hidden by the Jehovah’s Witnesses in subsequent editions of their version of the Bible.

We here reproduce the page in question:

⁶³ “The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC., 1969

⁶⁴ op. cit., p. 10, emphasis added.

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The original, 1961, printing of the "New World Translation"

Those who have been familiar with Jehovah's Witness publications for a number of years will recognise the green cover of this edition.

In fact, it would be possible to work through much of the New World Translation, showing the inconsistencies in this version, inconsistencies introduced by the Jehovah's Witnesses in order to avoid clashes with their doctrines. I refer to Howe's books⁶⁵ for a detailed study of many words and passages.

⁶⁵ See references above.

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13. A South American Pastor

This systematic changing of the meaning of the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] whenever it refers to Christ was seen by a South American pastor in conversation with a Jehovah's Witness:

“(In) John 9:38 ... They translate: ‘Then he said: “I do put faith in him, Lord.” And he did obeisance to him.’ I said to the Witness with whom I was speaking, ‘but the Greek word is “worship”.’ And he said to me: ‘Always when it talks about Jesus, it must be translated “do obeisance”.’ So, I thought, there is no way out, because they had already decided that for Jesus the word “worship” could not be used, but only “do obeisance”. Then it’s as you say in your article on Romans 9:5: they approach the Greek text “from the wrong end”. They had already decided that Jesus Christ is not God, and for that reason they couldn’t use the word “worship” in the translation.’”⁶⁶

This is precisely right. In fact, the pastor was quoting from the article on this website on Romans 9:5.⁶⁷ There we wrote:

The problem purely arises because some people, in our days principally the Jehovah's Witnesses, essentially claim, “It can't mean this. Therefore what can it mean instead of this?” This is in fact the approach of the Jehovah's Witnesses to any verse whose obvious meaning they reject, and Jehovah's Witnesses have said precisely this to me: “It can't mean this, so it must mean something else.”

In this, they are approaching the Greek text “from the wrong end”:

- they are starting with *their beliefs* and then trying to find a meaning in the passage that does not conflict with those beliefs, so they change the obvious meaning and say something different, sometimes adding or suppressing words, changing the word order or adding punctuation that is not justified by the structure of the original text.

However, this is not the way to do a translation.

- The way to do a translation is *to start with what the text says* and to render *that meaning* into the target language – in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, always only into English, as all their “translations” into other languages are actually translations *from their English version* (The New World Translation), ***not from the Greek!***

If what the Greek text actually says creates a problem for the adherents of any religious group, or for those who believe any particular religious dogma, that should be tackled by the theologians or leaders of that group. ***It is not the job of translators to avoid problems for their doctrine by changing the meaning of the text.*** Yet that is what the Jehovah's Witnesses have done throughout their version of the Bible, which therefore really doesn't merit the description “translation”, as it isn't; it's a *modification* or a *change* of the meaning of the text, so that it matches their doctrines.

⁶⁶ My translation of the pastor's words. For the Bible quotation, I have used the English NWT edition of 1961.

⁶⁷ Rom 9:5 http://livingwater-spain.com/Rom_9_5.pdf, page 15 in the version consulted on 15.8.20.

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14. προσκυνέω [proskunéō] and the Jehovah’s Witness apologist Jason BeDuhn

In our review of BeDuhn’s book, we point out this problem⁶⁸:

BeDuhn makes blanket condemnations of all other translations for supposedly translating incorrectly, while hiding the fact that the NWT does exactly the same thing, even with the same words

As an example, he objects to the translation of the Greek word προσκυνέω [“proskunéō”] as “worship” with reference to Jesus, stating (p. 47) “the presence of such an idea cannot be supported by selectively translating a word one way when it refers to Jesus and another way when it refers to someone else.”

However, this is *precisely* what the NWT does, translating the word as “do obeisance” when referring to Jesus, but as “worship” in other occasions, not only when it applies to God but also even when it applies to “the Beast” in Rev 13:4, etc.

Does he not realise that this is what the NWT has done? He does, after all, dedicate a whole chapter to this one Greek word. How is it possible that he did not see that what he was criticising other translations for doing is precisely what the NWT does *with the same word* – with the difference that their *normal* rendering of the word is “worship”, but that they “selectively translate [it] ... another way” when it applies to Jesus, to prevent their readers seeing the Biblical evidence that Jesus was in fact *worshipped*.

This is clearly determined by the doctrinal orientation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and one is led to the inescapable conclusion that BeDuhn shares the same theology, in spite of his protestations that he would not allow theological considerations to influence his decisions (see the previous section of my review of his book).

BeDuhn writes elsewhere (p. 108) that “Inconsistency in translation is often an indicator of bias.” The inconsistency in the translation of προσκυνέω [“proskunéō”] by the New World Translation *reveals precisely that bias*, and BeDuhn’s handling of this word is a very partisan account that promotes Jehovah’s Witness doctrine while ignoring or hiding the evidence of the bias that is clearly present specifically in the New World Translation. In doing this, BeDuhn reveals his own profound bias.

15. The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ revised Bible text of 2013

The revisers of the NWT state that one of the “Features of This Revision” is “Use of modern, understandable language.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, whenever the word προσκυνέω [proskunéō] refers to Christ, they continue to use the phrase “do obeisance”, a phrase which was already archaic when used in their first edition of 1950. However, they now add an alternative to “do obeisance” in a footnote, every time that they use “do obeisance”. The alternative is the phrase “bow down”. Thus,

⁶⁸ <http://livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>, p. 52 of the edition consulted on 23.8.20.

⁶⁹ “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures – Revised 2013” Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.: WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC., 2013, p. 1722.

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in Matthew 2:11, to take just one example, their text says, “And when they went into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and falling down, they did obeisance* to him.” The asterisk gives their alternative: Or “bowed down.” We can readily see why they chose not to include this in the main text, which would thus read, “falling down, they bowed down.” If they had put these two phrases together it would have shown how untenable and even meaningless the sentence becomes, apart from being physically impossible: having fallen down to the ground, thereafter bowing down would not be possible! Yet *the revisers of the Jehovah’s Witness version do all this to hide the clear meaning of the Greek text*, that the Wise Men fell down and worshipped Christ.

We must of course remember that the Jehovah’s Witnesses who may come to our door are not responsible for these falsifications of Scripture; they are sincere, but – like the majority of the members of the sect – they have been deceived by the leaders of the Organization, who have changed the text of the Bible in order to hide the errors in the teaching of the sect. So we must treat those who come to our door with consideration and politeness, while not accepting the validity of any quotation that they might make from their version of the Bible, as the true meaning of the original text has been changed by the Organization.

Conclusion

We thus see that consistently throughout the New Testament, from the first book to the last, Christ was worshipped and that he was described as worthy of worship. Indeed worship of him was demanded of Christian believers, including the earliest believers, who were Jews and as such, fiercely monotheistic.

There are many other indications in the New Testament that Christ was worshipped by believers from the earliest days of Christianity, and that he should be worshipped. For instance, there are the many passages where he is referred to as “God”. As is to be expected, each of these passages is disputed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but this article is not the place to examine this further.⁷⁰

The New Testament also repeatedly takes Old Testament passages about Yahweh and applies them to Christ. Abundant evidence has been presented above that Christ was indeed worshipped, so we will not lengthen this article further with an examination of such passages.

The worship of Christ as God has been practised for two thousand years, since the earliest days after his resurrection. In the New Testament church there were controversies about some matters, such as whether or not new believers had to fulfil the requirements of Jewish law, but the worship of Christ was not controversial. It was practised by all believers and today is still practised by all the major branches of Christianity.

Regardless of their own personal beliefs or lack of beliefs, academics and specialists in Koiné Greek and in the text of the New Testament recognise that in New Testament times and in the text of the New Testament, Christ was worshipped as God.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to base all their doctrines on the teachings of the Bible, but in order to justify their rejection of the worship of Christ and the Deity of Christ, they have had to resort to redefining the meanings of words and to changing the text of the Bible, to make it align with their doctrines. In this they have not been honest in their translation nor in their handling of the clear

⁷⁰ Some of these passages have been examined elsewhere on this website, for instance, John 1:1 http://livingwater-spain.com/John_1_1.pdf, John 8:58 http://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf, Romans 9:5 http://livingwater-spain.com/Rom_9_5.pdf, 1 Timothy 3:16 http://livingwater-spain.com/1Tim3_16.pdf.

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meaning of the Biblical text. It is therefore not surprising that in the whole of the seventy years since they first published their version of the New Testament, it has not found acceptance by a single Christian group or by a single independent academic institution or university worldwide. We are aware that to the members of this sect, which declares that all Christian churches worldwide belong to Satan, this rejection of their version of the Bible is a “proof” that it, alone, is right. Independent observers and experts in the Biblical languages fail to find this argument convincing, in the face of the clear meaning of the texts in the original languages.

Matthew’s gospel tells us that when Jesus’ disciples were overwhelmed by the realisation that he was supernatural, they “worshipped him.” (Matthew 14:33) That was also the response of the earliest followers of Christ. It is still the only valid response today.