

Worship (The Introduction)

By

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When you hear this word do you get a specific picture in your mind? Does it look like what you do each Sunday morning? Is it a concert of music no one seems to know that constantly repeats followed by a message that is shorter than the time the congregation spent in song? Is it so liturgical that you could do it in your sleep because the entire service is committed to memory? Is it something you do on a given day of the week only to forget it until you pass through the doors the next week? Is it something that you enjoy?

How does God define worship?

In order to understand this concept and better apply it, we need to go to the Hebrew writings as God defined it. The key word is the Hebrew verb עבד (*avad*), which occurs 289 times, predominantly in the qal form. I know this is where your eyes roll back in your head and you tune out. When I did this from the pulpit many would simply nod off or start doodling. Unfortunately, noun, verb and adverb constructs are critical to understanding Hebrew just as it is in understanding English, which I admit was not my strongest subject in school. In Hebrew grammar the qal is the simple paradigm of the verb. It is the common or basic stem of a verb usually in the active voice. The fundamental meanings of the verb are found in the qal. Other words can be formed using the root as we can see in the noun that shares the same root, עבדה (*avodah*). This occurs 145 times, making this word group a major theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. Another form of this same word is עבד (*aved*), which occurs an additional 800 times. Since this word group appears so many times in Scripture it is one we should pay special attention to. Its semantic root is the concept of service, whether serving people (freely or as slaves), serving God or idols (worship), or serving in some vocational capacity. As we can see from this root the word is bound up into three things; work, worship and service. You have probably already guessed that this word *avad* is much more complex than one of the simple translations we use as worship.

As I said, *Avad* is usually translated into our English version in three ways; service, worship and work. That makes it very interesting on what God means when he uses the word *avad*. It has been said that all we need to learn about God and his purpose for us is in the first few chapters of Genesis. That is also true when we study worship. But if we look back at the Creation narrative of Genesis 2, we might find a different picture of worship than we expected. Man was placed in the garden formed out of the dust of the earth to do one thing and one thing only.....*avad*. One form of what we translate as worship is this concept of work. Have you ever heard someone say that they didn't need to go to church to worship? Well technically although not their intended meaning what they said was fundamentally true. Verse 7 of Genesis chapter 2 and verse 15 of Genesis show that man was formed placed in the garden and for the sole purpose to tend it and till it. He was placed there to work. Work and worship to God are one and the same. So how does that stack up against what we call worship today. We were formed for a purpose, with one of those purposes to work (*avad*) in God's creation. How is what you do on any given Sunday morning stack up against God's definition of worship?

Over the next few articles I would like to explore the three aspects of *avad*; Work, worship and service. Only with a complete understanding of all three do we find what God's idea of worship is and how we stack up to that definition.