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Title “They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him”: Proskynesis before Jesus in Its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context

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Abstract The New Testament records that Jesus’s disciples “worshipped” him during several postresurrection theophanies. To understand the disciples’ actions on these sacred occasions, it is necessary to understand the rite of proskynesis as observed in ancient Israel (particularly in the Jerusalem temple) and in the surrounding cultures and cults of the ancient Near East. When scripture uses terms rendered “worship,” proskynesis (concrete, hierarchical prostrations of an inferior to a superior rather than just abstract veneration) is almost always intended. Literally a “kissing in the presence [of]” a superior being, proskynesis acknowledges the recipient’s divinity and the giver’s submissive humility. Proskynesis was also a sublime and supreme expression of love. As John foresaw, the God who was “apprehended” in the Jerusalem temple with proskynesis will be acknowledged not as a pseudo-divine Caesar or Herod but as universal Sovereign by the numberless hosts of those he redeems. Proskynesis, then, is a (disciple’s) means of actualizing eschatological reality and Jesus’s unrivaled position in that reality.

“THEY CAME AND HELD HIM BY THE FEET AND WORSHIPPED HIM”: PROSKYNESIS BEFORE JESUS IN ITS BIBLICAL AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT

Matthew L. Bowen

We may gain insight into the earliest Christian understanding of Jesus by examining how the evangelists describe supplicants of Christ, both Jewish and Gentile, and how the book of Revelation depicts his heavenly worship.¹ These accounts commonly mention a reverential gesture, actual or implied, called proskynesis, which stems from a Greek word meaning literally “kissing in the presence of.” The Greek historian Herodotus first used the word *proskynesis* to describe the ancient Persian rite of “prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.”² But proskynesis can be broadly understood as “the hierarchical prostration of inferior to

1. This paper presents research either not included or only briefly treated in my paper “‘They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree’: Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12-19 and 17:9-10 and Its Significance,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012), 107-29. Special thanks go to Andrew Skinner, Gaye Strathearn, Brian Hauglid, Carl Griffin, and Shirley Ricks. I would also like to thank my father, Lon Bowen, who has taught me by example the meaning of *worship*. All biblical citations herein are from the King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 882. See Herodotus, *Histories* 1.134.

superior”³ or, in a narrower cultic sense, as “formal submission in the presence of a being from the divine realm.”⁴ In other words, through this act human beings “are to be recognized as belonging to the divine realm.”⁵ The New Testament writers have several different ways of expressing this concept, but most often they just directly employ the verb *proskyneō* (sixty times).

Proskynesis before Jesus in the New Testament follows a practice attested throughout the ancient Near East. Prostration formulas are found throughout the Hebrew Bible, especially in the psalms: “the hymns of the [Jerusalem] temple”⁶ urge the Israelites to bow down before Yahweh. As I will show, these earlier precedents inform our understanding of what Jesus’s disciples and other supplicants signified in approaching Jesus with this gesture. It is evident that they acknowledge Jesus not only as belonging to the divine realm, but as divine in the fullest sense. Following his resurrection he was, in their view, fully God and King of Israel (cf. Matthew 28:18).

Proskynesis as Worship

When the word *worship* occurs in English translations of scripture, a word denoting the act of proskynesis almost always underlies it. Although the word *worship* itself has acquired increasing semantic breadth,⁷ it fundamentally denotes the act of proskynesis. *Worship* derives from Old English *weorðscipe* (lit. *worth*[y] + *ship*), which for-

3. Albert B. Bosworth, “Alexander (3) III (‘the Great’) of Macedon,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 59.

4. Kenneth Grayston, “The Translation of Matthew 28.17,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21 (1984): 107. Scholars often use *proskynesis* as an umbrella term for hierarchical and cultic prostrations of various kinds. I also will use *proskynesis* in this extended sense throughout this paper.

5. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 882.

6. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 45.

7. Today *worship* is used more often in an abstract sense. This can be seen in the phrase *worship services*, a description that offers only the vaguest idea of the actual contents of such services.

merly meant not only to “regard or approach [a deity] with veneration,” but also “to adore with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies.”⁸

Early translators of the Bible into English used *worship* to represent the Hebrew verb *hištaḥăwâ* and the Greek verb *proskyneō*, especially where God is the object of the obeisance.⁹ Some modern translations continue to use *worship* to represent these terms. The Septuagint (LXX), a translation of the Hebrew Bible made by and for Greek-speaking Jews (and used by the New Testament writers), renders *hištaḥăwâ* with *proskyneō* almost uniformly.¹⁰ All these translators identified Israelite *hištaḥăwâ* with Greek *proskynesis* and Latin *adoratio* (“adoration”).¹¹

In placing oneself on the earth or ground in worship, there is also an anthropological dimension to proskynesis. The idea that a human being is formed from the ground or earth is found in the book of Genesis, where the man, or Adam, is created from the ground or soil and is “dust” that shall return to “dust” (see Genesis 3:19, 23). The word *humility* has a similar derivation, and indeed, proskynesis may be seen as the ritualization of humility, to “get down there [in

8. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “worship.” As a noun, *weorðscipe* originally meant “the condition (in a person) of deserving, or being held in, esteem or repute; honour, distinction, renown; good name, credit.” J. R. Clark Hall renders *weorðscipe* as “worth, respect, honor, dignity, glory.” See John R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), s.v. “weorðscipe.”

9. John Wycliffe used the verb *worscipe* to render the verb *adorare* in his translation from the Vulgate. William Tyndale retained *worship* when translating *hištaḥăwâ* from the original Hebrew.

10. See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (Including the Apocryphal Books)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 1217–18. In the LXX’s translation of the Aramaic material in the book of Daniel, the verb *proskyneō* is used to render the verb *šəgîd* into Greek (on the latter, see below).

11. As with the term *worship*, the English word *adoration* has undergone considerable semantic shift over time. *Adoration* comes from the Latin noun *adoratio*, which denotes an act of worship or obeisance. It derives from *ad ora* (lit. “to the mouth,” possibly originating with a gesture involving placing the right hand to the mouth and kissing) and is verbalized as *adorare*. The Latin Vulgate uses *adorare* to render both Hebrew *hištaḥăwâ* and Greek *proskyneō* into Latin.

the dust] and realize what you are.”¹² In humbling oneself to the dust, one ascribes honor and glory, and therefore worth, to God, who shaped creation from it.¹³

“Even So Do I Embrace” God: Proskynesis in Ancient Egypt

The liturgy, literature, and iconography of Egypt attest the importance of proskynesis throughout its long history. A passage from the daily temple liturgy of Karnak shows how this practice constituted an essential part of the daily worship there. A part of the ritual superscripted as “the incantation for kissing the ground [sn t3],” which immediately follows “the incantation for seeing God [m33 ntr],” directs the prophet¹⁴ to say, “As I kiss the ground, even so do I embrace Geb.”¹⁵ Geb is a metonym for, or a divine personification of, the ground or the earth. Hence the liturgy prescribes proskynesis, including a ritual embrace of a god (Geb, the earth), as part of a ritualized theophany in a temple setting. The parallelism of kiss/embrace and ground/Geb (i.e., the earth) creates a sublime and poetic metaphor for proskynesis—in the most self-abnegating of acts, one embraces God.

The Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, a fictive tale laden with cultic imagery and allusions, uses proskynesis as a *Leitmotif*. Throughout the story, the sailor piously emphasizes and reemphasizes that he was “on [his] belly in [the] presence” of a giant gilded snake, an almost unmistakable cipher for a god.¹⁶ The sailor’s prosky-

12. Hugh W. Nibley, “The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley,” in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 167.

13. See Psalms 29:2; 96:8; cf. D&C 84:102.

14. Lit. *hm-ntr*, “god’s servant.” See John Gee, “Prophets, Initiation, and the Egyptian Temple,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 31 (2004): 97–107.

15. *sn=i t3 hpt gb*, translation mine. *Rituale für den Kultus des Amon und für den Kultus der Mut* (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1901), plate 3005, IV, 6–7.

16. Compare the image of the brazen serpent in Numbers 21:4–9. He describes the posture of proskynesis several times in the same language with only a little stylistic variation: *iw=i hr ht=i m-b3h=f* “while I was on my belly in his presence” (lines 82–83; translations here mine); *dm3.kw(i) hr ht=i dmi.n=i s3tw m-b3h=f* “I was splayed out on

nesis emphasizes the grandeur of the serpent-deity’s physical presence and thus the theophanic character of his experiences.

“Bowing” and “Scraping”: Proskynesis in Mesopotamia

The sheer number of Akkadian terms used to express this idea suggests its importance in Mesopotamian literature and liturgy: the verbs *kanāšum*,¹⁷ *kamāsum*,¹⁸ and *šukênum*¹⁹ all denote the act of proskynesis. The phrase *našāqum qaqqaram*, “to kiss the ground”—an idiom identical in meaning to Egyptian *sn t3*—is also abundantly attested.²⁰ Additional terms occur in an epistolary context (see below). The phrase *našāqum šēpī*, “to kiss the feet,” represents a more vivid kind of proskynesis than a simple flat prostration on the earth. As in the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, proskynesis also serves as a theme in the Gilgamesh epic, which uses the dramatic idiom *našāqum šēpī* at key moments to emphasize the divine nature and theophanic majesty of its heroes, Gilgamesh and Enkidu.²¹

Sumerian, a very ancient non-Semitic language, also has several idioms that describe proskynesis. These expressions often name the body part involved in the change of posture. For example, *gú . . . lal* meant to “extend the neck” and thus “to bow down; to kneel; to

my belly and I touched the ground in his presence” (lines 137–38); *ḥ^c.n rdi.n=i wi ḥr ḥt=i ʿwy=i ḥ3m.w m-b3ḥ=f* “Then I cast myself upon my belly, my arms bent up in his presence” (line 161); *ḥpr.n rdi.tw=i wi ḥt=i r dw3 n=f nṛ* “And it came to pass that I cast myself on my belly to thank god” (line 166). Text in Aylward M. Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories. Part I* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1932), 41–48.

17. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. John A. Brinkman et al. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1980), K, 144–48: “to submit to an overlord, a deity”; “to bend down, to bow down” (hereafter CAD).

18. CAD K, 117–20: “to squat, to kneel, to kneel in prayer or submission.”

19. CAD Š 3:214–18: “to prostrate oneself” (i.e., before gods), “to submit, to do obeisance.”

20. CAD XI N 2:58–59. See also the entry for *nuššuqum qaqqaram*.

21. See OB Tablet II col. I, lines 10–11, 20–21; Tablet VI, lines 12–16; Tablet VII, line 143, in Andrew George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:172, 616, 640.

embrace.”²² Similarly, *gú ki-šè . . . ġar*²³ denotes placing one’s neck on the earth, that is, prostrating oneself. Perhaps the most evocative of the Sumerian prostration idioms means “to scrape the earth (with one’s nose).”²⁴ The Hittites used the expression *kattan ħaliya-ari* to signify “bow[ing] down” or “prostrat[ing] oneself” before someone.²⁵

I Am the (Virtual) “Dust at Your Feet”: Proskynesis in an Epistolary Context

As the Amarna letters particularly illustrate, when it came to submitting oneself to an overlord in the politico-diplomatic realm of the ancient Near East, it was possible to “mail it in.” In the letters the vassal flatters his overlord, the Pharaoh Akhenaten, with declarations like “[I am] your slave” and “the dust at your feet,”²⁶ together with a so-called prostration or obeisance formula such as “at the feet of my king, my lord, my son, my god, seven times and seven times I prostrate; at the feet of my king, my lord I fall.”²⁷ Anson F. Rainey writes, “The intention is to express the act of obeisance required of subordinates visiting the Egyptian court: prostration seven times on the belly and seven times on the back, an aerobic feat of no small consequence.”²⁸ The rhetoric emphasizes that vassals view themselves as “even less than the dust of the earth” vis-à-vis their overlord.²⁹

22. Or *gú . . . lá*. Compare John A. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon: A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language* (Los Angeles: Logogram, 2006), 86.

23. Or *gú ki-šè . . . lal/lá*. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon*, 86.

24. (*Kiri*;) *ki su ub*. Compare Egyptian *sn t3*, “kiss the earth” (lit. “nose the earth”), discussed above.

25. See Harry A. Hoffner Jr. and H. Craig Melchert, *A Grammar of the Hittite Language. Part 2: Tutorial* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 56.

26. El-Amarna Letters (=EA) 195, 233, 235, 297, 299, 331, 378 (*inter alia*) contain this phrase. This expression, or variations on it, are abundantly attested, e.g., “I am the dust under the sandals of the king” (EA 147), “I am the dust under the feet and sandals of the king” (EA 149), etc. See William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), *passim*.

27. EA 235:5–11.

28. Anson F. Rainey, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: References and Index of Texts Cited* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 193.

29. See Mosiah 4:2; Moses 1:9–10.

“Causing Oneself to Live”? Israelite *hištaḥwâ*

The Hebrew verb *hištaḥwâ*, occurring some 170 times in the Hebrew Bible,³⁰ is frequently rendered “worship” in our scriptures, but the concrete act of proskynesis is always denoted (see above). The Aramaic verb *səgid*³¹ and the Arabic verb *sajada*³² express comparable meanings in those languages.³³ H. D. Preuss believes that *hištaḥwâ* “probably expresses a stage beyond *sāghadh*,”³⁴ and Othmar Keel suggests that it expresses an “interior attitude.”³⁵

Hištaḥwâ has been traditionally analyzed as a hithpael form of the root *šhy/šḥh. Taking into account its clear similarity to Ugaritic *yštḥwy*, “to prostrate oneself,”³⁶ more recent studies have argued for a different origin.³⁷ Martin Hartmann first made the suggestion that *hištaḥwâ* derives from a Semitic root *ḥwy rather than *šhy (or *šḥh).³⁸ After evidence from Ugarit became available,

30. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 295–96; see also Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 360.

31. The verb *səgid* is the verb used in the Aramaic material in Daniel (2:46; 3:5–28 passim) and to translate *hištaḥwâ* in the Aramaic Targums.

32. The term *mosque* (< French *mosquée* < Latin *mosquea* < Greek *masgidion* < Arabic *masjid*) is a cognate noun derived from *sajada*, i.e., “place of worship,” “place of prostration.”

33. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 462–63: “to bow down, bow in worship; to throw o.s. down, prostrate o.s. . . . to worship.” See also the derived noun *sujūd*, “prostration, adoration, worship.”

34. H. D. Preuss, “חַוַּחַּ חַוַּחַּ, חַוַּחַּ חַוַּחַּ *hishach^avāh*,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:249.

35. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (1978; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 308.

36. Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 381. They note that it is used in parallel with “the prostration formula” = *hbr w ql*, “bow and fall down” (KTU 1.3 III 10). See also Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary*, 333.

37. A few scholars, like John A. Emerton, still favor the traditional view. See J. A. Emerton, “The Etymology of *Hištaḥ^awāh*,” *Oudtestamentische Studien* 20 (1977): 41–55.

38. Martin Hartmann, “Die Pluriliteralbildungen in den semitischen Sprachen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Hebräischen, Chaldäischen, und Neusyrischen.

William F. Albright revisited this idea, suggesting that *hištaḥwā* was derived from a *ḥwy (or *ḥwh) root cognate with the Arabic root *ḥawā*, meaning “to coil up or constrict like a snake.”³⁹ More interesting, perhaps, is Siegfried Kruezer’s more recent suggestion (revisiting Hartmann) that it derives from *ḥwy/hyy (“to live”) and means to cheer, celebrate, and hence worship, referencing ancient worship or fealty formulas like the familiar, “Long live the king!”⁴⁰ or even, as Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor phrase it, “to cause oneself to live (through worship),”⁴¹ that is, through proskynesis.⁴² This would compare to the Arabic form *istahyā*, “to spare [someone’s] life, let live, keep alive,”⁴³ and may find some support in Keel’s observation that such “falling down is equivalent to the death-feigning reflex well-known to behavioral research.”⁴⁴

Erster Theil: Bildung durch Wiederholung des letzten Radicales am Schluss und des ersten nach dem zweiten” (inaugural dissertation, Halle, 1875), 17.

39. William F. Albright, “The North-Canaanite Epic of *ʿAlpeyan Baʿal and Mot*,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 12 (1932): 197n41. See also G. I. Davies, “A Note on the Etymology of *hištaḥawāh*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 29/4 (1979): 493-95. This meaning of *ḥawā* is still preserved in modern Arabic. Compare the entries listed under form V in Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 255: “to curl (up), coil (up).”

40. Siegfried Kreuzer, “Zur Bedeutung und Etymologie von *hištaḥawah/yšthwy*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 35/1 (1985): 39-60; supported by Josef Tropper, *Der ugaritische Kausativstamm und die Kausativbildungen des Semitischen* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 72-75. See also Wilfred G. E. Watson, “An Egyptian Cognate for Ugaritic *ḤWY* (II)?” in *Egyptian and Semito-Hamitic (Afro-Asiatic) Studies: In Memoriam W. Vycichl*, ed. Gábor Takács (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 155-59.

41. Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 360.

42. Here, then, we may also have a philological solution to the paradox “there shall no man see me and live” (Exodus 33:20), although some have done just that (see Exodus 24:11). “To cause oneself to live” through proskynesis accords with D&C 67:11: “For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except *quicken*ed [made to live] by the Spirit of God.” Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 310, says, “Should a man live nonetheless, it is only due to the grace of God.” See especially 2 Nephi 25:29; D&C 84:18-22.

43. Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 256. According to Wilfred Watson, the cognate Arabic noun *taḥīya* or *taḥāyā*, “greeting; salutation; salute; cheer (= wish that God may give s.o. long life),” also would seem to support Kreuzer’s conclusion. See Watson, “Egyptian Cognate,” 155n2; Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 257.

44. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 310.

Another suggestion is that *hištaḥwâ* derives from the Egyptian *ḥwi*, “beat, strike, smite,”⁴⁵ attested in Ugaritic as **ḥwy*, meaning “to throw oneself down and strike the earth.”⁴⁶ While possible,⁴⁷ this is less likely since this root is otherwise unattested in Hebrew in any other verbal or nominal form.⁴⁸ Whatever can be said for the scientific etymology of *hištaḥwâ*, it is certain, as Waltke and O’Connor note, that “the unusual shape of the word hints at its extraordinary cultural significance.”⁴⁹

“Kissing” the Feet of Yahweh

That Israelite worship was to involve proskynesis in Yahweh’s presence is clear from texts like Psalm 95:6: “O come, *let us worship* and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.” The so-called worship injunctions of Psalm 95, and other enthronement psalms, suggested the proper gesture for approach.

Like Psalm 95, Psalm 2 is an enthronement psalm that was connected with coronation in ancient Israel. We know how the earliest Christians interpreted the divine rebirth (or adoption) formula of Psalm 2:7 because they applied it to Jesus.⁵⁰ But it is more difficult to say what ancient Israelites and early Aramaic-speaking Christians would have made of later portions of this psalm, especially the phrase in verse 11 rendered in the King James Version (KJV) as “kiss the Son.” This may be a corrupted text, and a widely accepted

45. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 165. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 3:46-48.

46. See discussion in Watson, “Egyptian Cognate,” 155-59.

47. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), §847. Watson, “Egyptian Cognate,” 155, notes that Gordon’s explanation “has been rejected by Ugaritic scholars in favor of the explanation by Kreuzer.”

48. See Emerton, “Etymology of *Hištaḥwâ*,” 46. The root **ḥwy/hyy*, on the other hand, is productive and well-attested in several verbal stems, as well as in nominal/adjectival forms.

49. Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 361.

50. See Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5.

alternative reading is “with trembling kiss his feet” (RSV, NRSV).⁵¹ Barnabas Lindars suggests that “the picture given by [this] most probable restoration . . . is certainly the homage of vassal kings to their overlord” but also notes that “these words could be used at any coronation ceremony during the whole period of the monarchy.”⁵² Carsten Vang has more recently mounted a defense of “kiss the Son,”⁵³ but in either case, the problematic readings preserved in other ancient biblical versions may have arisen as attempts to resolve the theological difficulties presented by the verb *kiss* in a temple ritual context.⁵⁴

Another important question is how closely the dynastic son of 2 Samuel 7 (Solomon), who became Yahweh’s own “son” (v. 4), was identified with Yahweh himself. Margaret Barker has observed how in the Chronicler’s account of Solomon’s enthronement the people “worship Yahweh and the king” (1 Chronicles 29:20) and how Solomon “was enthroned upon the throne of Yahweh” (1 Chronicles 29:23; translations mine). Barker proposes that on this occasion the king *was* Yahweh (the Lord).⁵⁵ Conceptual support for this can be seen in Psalms 45 and 72 and the royal, theophanic appearance of

51. Alfred Bertholet, “Eine crux interpretum,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 28 (1908): 58–59. See also D. Winton Thomas, *The Text of the Revised Psalter* (London: SPCK, 1963), 1; Barnabas Lindars, “Is Psalm II an Acrostic Poem?” *Vetus Testamentum* 17/1 (1967): 61.

52. Lindars, “Is Psalm II an Acrostic Poem?” 61.

53. Carsten Vang, “Ps 2,11–12: A New Look at an Old Crux Interpretum,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 9 (1995): 163–85.

54. Yahweh is clearly the one to be “served” in Psalm 2:11a, but some biblical texts (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:12) do not present him as a being that could be “kissed,” although his “feet” are sometimes mentioned in theophanic texts (e.g., Exodus 24:10; Psalm 18:9 [2 Samuel 22:10]; Zechariah 14:4; cf. Ezekiel 43:7). In the Hebrew Bible, “kissing” is mentioned as an act of obeisance in two infamous instances: almost all of Israel kisses Baal (1 Kings 19:18) and the “calves” (Hosea 13:2). Even if “son” is taken to mean a royal son, as Yahweh’s earthly surrogate, the earthly “King of Zion” (Psalm 2:6), kissing him in obeisance would have been nonetheless problematic for strict adherents of Deuteronomism (see Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

55. The scene in 1 Chronicles 29:20–23, with its cultic meal eaten “before the Lord,” or “in the presence of the Lord” (i.e., the temple), is reminiscent of the events of 3 Nephi 11–18. See Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: Clark, 2003), esp. 46, 61, 68, 81, 96, 126, 189, 217, and 231.

Simon the High Priest in Ben Sira 50:1-21.⁵⁶ This would explain how the earliest Christians were prepared to think of Jesus as being both Yahweh their God and the Davidic king.

“Thou Shalt Worship the Lord Thy God”: Proskynesis in Matthew

Matthew sees Jesus as both Yahweh the God of Israel and as the Davidic king, who in both the temple and royal monarchic tradition was due reverence and *hištaḥăwâ*. He adopts the LXX’s use of *proskyneō* for *hištaḥăwâ*, which he employs thirteen times in his gospel as a *Leitwort* (“key word”).⁵⁷

Matthew makes clear at the beginning of his gospel that he sees Jesus as fully divine. His narrative about Jesus’s birth and infancy cites Isaiah’s prophecy that Jesus will be Immanuel, a Hebrew name meaning “with us is God.”⁵⁸ He sustains the image of “God with us” throughout his gospel by his use of the proskynesis motif. When the wise men come from the east to Jerusalem, they ask: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to *worship him*” (Matthew 2:2).

Recognizing that the birth of the Messiah constitutes a threat to his client kingship, Herod ascertains from the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus will be born in Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2). He then dissimulates: “And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and *worship him* also” (Matthew 2:8). The truth, however, is that Herod himself wishes to be so revered and thus attempts to eliminate the child.

In spite of this potential threat, the wise men are divinely guided via the star to where Mary and Joseph reside with Jesus. Upon seeing the baby Jesus, the actions of the wise men are cultically appropriate: “And when they were *come* into the house, they saw the

56. See 3 Nephi 11:1-19; 17:9-10; Hebrews 1:5; 5:1-10; 7:1-28; 9:1-28.

57. On *Leitworte* as a literary device, see Martin Buber, *Darko shel Mikra: ‘iyunim bi-defuse-signon ba-Tanakh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1964), 284.

58. See Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10.

young child with Mary his mother, and *fell down*, and *worshipped him*: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). Their “coming,” “falling down,” and “worshipping” constitutes a prostration formula similar to those found in the Hebrew Bible.

Proskynesis, and to whom it is properly due, is the concluding and summative issue in the devil’s temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4). The devil comes to Jesus near the end of his wilderness fast, “cit[ing] scripture for his purpose.”⁵⁹ Jesus responds to each temptation and scriptural citation (Exodus 34:28; Psalm 91:11) with scriptural citations of his own, all of them from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; and 6:13). In the last temptation, the devil offers Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,” if “thou wilt fall down and *worship me*” (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus responds again with a reference to Deuteronomy: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (Matthew 4:10).⁶⁰

Jesus’s response is more than a pious creedal recitation. For Matthew, Jesus *is* the Lord of whom Deuteronomy speaks, the Lord to whom proskynesis is due, just as he is the Lord who is not to be tempted (Deuteronomy 6:16) and the Lord by whose every word humans are to live (Deuteronomy 8:3). The devil’s demand for proskynesis is ironic and preposterous, based on the false premise that “the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” are his to give. Jesus, as Yahweh, is creator and ruler of the world. The devil, like Herod and Caesar, is a ranting, raving pretender to his throne (see Moses 1:19).

Matthew uses the proskynesis motif not only to identify Jesus as Yahweh, but to stress his superiority over Moses. As W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison have noted, the phrase *when he was come down from the mountain* (Matthew 8:1) is “almost identical” to the LXX A

59. Thus Shakespeare alludes to this incident: “The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose / An evil soul producing holy witness” (*Merchant of Venice* 1.3.98-99).

60. A paraphrase of Deuteronomy 5:9, 6:13, and 10:20. The numerous verbal parallels between this incident and the temptation of Moses are striking—Satan also demands proskynesis from Moses to no avail (see Moses 1:11-22).

version of Exodus 34:29, thus “send[ing] the reader’s thoughts back to Moses and Sinai.”⁶¹ Matthew then reports: “And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2). The prostration formula has a cultic resonance,⁶² but this language also recalls Moses’s actions on Sinai: “And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and *worshipped*” (Exodus 34:8). Jesus was the law-giving Lord worshipped on that occasion. Jesus does cleanse the leper but commands him to go and show himself to the priest and to “offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto [i.e. against] them” (Matthew 8:4). Moses intercedes on behalf of Miriam’s leprosy (Numbers 12:10–15), and Elisha gives instruction for the healing of Naaman’s leprosy (2 Kings 5:1–14), but the power to heal was, and is, in Jesus.⁶³

Matthew uses proskynesis to stress Jesus’s preeminence over past prophets, but also over gods. Just as he contrasted Jesus (as Yahweh) with both worldly and otherworldly pretenders to divine kingship (Herod and the devil), he also uses the motif to emphasize Jesus’s superiority over Israel’s other enemies,⁶⁴ namely, Death (Mot) and Hell (Sheol). Death and Hell were traditionally personified as deities or quasi-deities.⁶⁵ Therefore, when the daughter of a Jewish religious leader dies, her father calls upon Jesus to exercise his authority over death: “Behold, there came a certain ruler, and *worshipped him*, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live” (Matthew 9:18). This

61. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 2: Matthew 8–18* (London: Clark, 2004), 9. The text “is drawing a parallel between Jesus and Moses and between Sinai and the mount of Jesus’ sermon.”

62. Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 10.

63. The events in Numbers 12 and 2 Kings 5 are important affirmations of Moses’s and Elisha’s prophetic offices. Matthew 8:1–4 emphasizes that Jesus too is a prophet but also divine.

64. See 1 Corinthians 15:25–26: “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

65. See, e.g., Isaiah 5:14; 28:15, 18; Habakkuk 2:5; Proverbs 1:12; 27:20; 30:15–16; Psalms 49:15 [Masoretic Text 14]; 141:7. Compare John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 185–225.

religious leader⁶⁶ recognizes that Jesus has Yahweh's authority over death and has power to restore his daughter to life (cf. Isaiah 25:8), and his observance of the Israelite temple-proskynesis emphasizes his identification of Jesus with Yahweh. His faith in Jesus is representative of the faith that Israel *should* have had in Yahweh's power over death (cf. Isaiah 28:18) and thus secures the desired blessing.

The next proskynesis scene emphasizes the disciples' acknowledgment of Jesus's power over the elements, reflecting the various presentations of Yahweh's superiority to Yamm,⁶⁷ Baal,⁶⁸ Dagan,⁶⁹ Mot, and other deities throughout the Hebrew Bible. The disciples enter a ship to cross over to the other side of the lake (Matthew 14:22), which places them out on the sea (Gk. *thalassa* = Heb. *yām*; cf. 14:25). This is the domain of the old Canaanite water-deity Yamm, yet Jesus not only walks on the water (i.e., treads on Yamm) but enables Peter to do so too (Matthew 14:28-30). He rebukes the storm-wind, a hallmark of Baal as Canaanite storm-god. Jesus's power over the elements here not only bespeaks his divinity, but demonstrates that he is Yahweh, the God of Israel. Recognizing this, "they that were in the ship . . . *worshipped him*, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).

When Jesus passes over to Tyre and Sidon, he passes further into old Baalist country. He is met by a Syro-Phoenician woman, called here "a woman of Canaan" (Matthew 15:22). She is, however—unlike many Israelites in Israel's history—no Baal worshipper:

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and *worshipped him*, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to [*the*]

66. Identified as Jairus in Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41.

67. See John P. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt. 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15b-21* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981).

68. Fred E. Woods, *Water and Storm Polemics against Baalism in the Deuteronomical History* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), passim; Fred E. Woods, "Who Controls the Water? Yahweh vs. Baal," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 4 (2003): 1-12.

69. See the afflictions which the ark brought upon Dagon and the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5-6.

dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet *the dogs* [*ta kynaria*] eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:24-28)

The Syro-Phoenician woman's proskynesis before Jesus reflected her surpassing faith. At first he tests that faith, including her among the little dogs to whom it was not fitting to cast the blessings reserved for the children (i.e., the “children of Israel,” the “children of the covenant”). The term *dog* was used as an ethnic pejorative for Gentiles among some religious Jews during Jesus's time.⁷⁰ Jesus uses the slur ironically here. The Greek text puns on the *-kyn-* in *prosekynei* and *kynaria* (“little dogs”) apparently with reference to her posture—she is prostrate, doglike, at the table of her “master” or “lord.”

Her response indicates to Jesus that this non-Israelite has great faith in Israel's covenant blessings—blessings that the children of Israel were themselves neglecting. She recognizes that those blessings have their source in the Lord himself and that she wants to be a partaker of them. She passes Jesus's test and Jesus makes her daughter whole. She becomes a partaker in Israel's blessings through faith, and her proskynesis before Jesus is offered up as evidence of that faith.

Jesus is also the divine king in his parable of the ungrateful servant. A certain king “took account” of his servants, and one of them was found to have a 10,000-talent debt, a hyperbolic figure for a debt so large it could not realistically be repaid. “But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore *fell down*, and *worshipped him*, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (Matthew 18:25-26). His lord “was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt” (18:27), not because of the servant's proskynesis or his

70. See Deuteronomy 23:18, which excludes Canaanite cult functionaries as “dogs.”

desperate (and impossible) promise that he would repay the whole debt, but by his plea for patience.

This proskynesis before his lord was an appropriate acknowledgment of his lord's identity, but immediately the servant is exposed as halfhearted. For after being forgiven his irreparable debt, he then chokes a fellow-servant over a negligible debt to himself. Though the wretch pleads at his feet for forgiveness, the servant throws the fellow-servant into debtors' prison, from which he cannot repay even his modest debt (Matthew 18:28–30).⁷¹ In spite of his lord's patience toward him, the ungrateful servant fails to show his fellow the least forbearance.

This story suggests that love for God and love for others are not unconnected acts (cf. Matthew 22:35–40). The ungrateful servant rendered his own proskynesis and avowals meaningless when he received his lord's love and forgiveness but refused the least mercy to his fellow-servant. His graciousness thus spurned, the king is left with little choice but to “[deliver] him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (Matthew 18:34); the servant thus joins his abused fellow-servant in debtors' prison where he would “by no means come out thence, [until he had] paid the uttermost farthing” (Matthew 5:26).

As Jesus prepares to go up to Jerusalem to accomplish the atonement, Matthew records that the mother of James and John approached and supplicated him. Her manner of approach and words of entreaty indicate that she recognized Jesus's divinity: “Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, *worshipping* [*proskynousa*] him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom” (Matthew 20:20–21). The feminine participle *proskynousa* indicates that it was the mother, not her sons, who worshipped Jesus, and she likewise acknowledged his divinity in requesting the enthronement of her sons with Jesus in his kingdom.

71. On the paradox of debtors' prison, see 3 Nephi 12:26; cf. D&C 19:10–20.

Matthew arrives at the summation of his proskynesis theme in his postresurrection narrative, where Jesus’s disciples directly and physically experience the resurrected Jesus and bear witness to the reality of his atonement through proskynesis. When Jesus meets them in Galilee, Matthew reports: “And they came and *held him by the feet* [or, embraced his feet] and *worshipped him*” (Matthew 28:9). They found themselves at “the place of the soles of [the Lord’s] feet” (Ezekiel 43:7), the place of at-one-ment,⁷² just as Moses and the elders of Israel found themselves at Yahweh’s feet in Exodus 24:10.⁷³

Matthew closes his gospel with the account of another post-resurrection theophany (or Christophany), evoking the mountain theophanies from Exodus (3:1-4:17; 19:3-14; 24:9-11), Deuteronomy (5; cf. 1 Kings 19:7-8), and elsewhere:⁷⁴ “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they *worshipped* him: but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17). Kenneth Grayston suggests that this means “when they saw him, they threw themselves down in submission, though they doubted its effect.”⁷⁵ We are not told that they physically touched Jesus or held him by the feet, as when they rendered proskynesis to Jesus at his earlier appearance. It may be that some of the disciples were still struggling to fully understand or accept the reality of resurrection.

72. Manfred Görg, “Die Lade als Thronsockel,” *Biblische Notizen* 1 (1976): 29-30, has made the interesting (though not incontrovertible) suggestion that “mercy-seat,” Heb. *kappōret*, may have an Egyptian origin: *kp (n) rdwy* = “[place of] the sole of the foot.” In texts such as 3 Nephi 17 and Matthew 28, the feet of the Savior are the place of at-one-ment.

73. Exodus 24:10: “And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.” Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery record their vision in similar language: “We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber” (D&C 110:2). This “paved work” would have appeared much like the *kappōret* atop the ark of the covenant. See Exodus 26:34; 30:6; 31:7; 35:12; 37:6-9; 39:35; 40:20, Leviticus 16:2, 13-15; Numbers 7:89. The posture of the cherubim atop the ark may also suggest proskynesis.

74. See also Ezekiel 40; 1 Nephi 11-14.

75. Grayston, “Translation of Matthew 28.17,” 108.

Jesus's few reported words on this occasion are very significant: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:16-20). Jesus now has a fulness of divinity—he is *teleios*, meaning "perfected" or "fully initiated."⁷⁶ Jesus here commissions his disciples, authorizing them to perform the rites that will enable others to become likewise fully initiated. Matthew fittingly closes with Jesus's promise, "and, lo, I am with you alway[s]" (28:20), and creates a framing *inclusio* when Jesus is again named Emmanuel ("God with us"; see Matthew 1:23).⁷⁷ Unquestionably, in Matthew's theology Jesus is the God of Israel who condescends to be with humanity on his footstool and is worthy in every sense of the proskynesis accorded him in the Israelite temple and royal tradition.

Loving Much: Proskynesis in Luke

Where Matthew uses the LXX term *proskyneō*, the other evangelists regularly describe the same events using other language.⁷⁸ Luke uses *proskyneō* three times: twice when citing LXX Deuteronomy 6:13 in his version of the temptation narrative (Luke 4:7-8) and once in the closing words of his gospel (Luke 24:52). Otherwise, Luke prefers to use various phrases of similar meaning.⁷⁹

76. See Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48. Note also how in Hebrews *teleios* and its cognates describe Christ being "fully initiated," and his "initiating" God's sons and daughters (including the dead) and the present creation into celestial glory (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23).

77. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 1: Matthew 1-7* (London: Clark, 2004), 213.

78. For example, Matthew 8:2 says the leper "worshipped" (*prosekynei*) Jesus, while Luke 5:12 says the leper "fell on his face" and some versions of Mark 1:40 have "kneeling down." Similarly, Matthew's version of the story of Jairus's daughter says that Jairus "worshipped" Jesus (Matthew 8:19), where Mark and Luke record that he "fell at his feet" (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41).

79. By comparison, John uses *proskyneō* eleven times, but in every case with reference to different events than in Matthew's account. Nine of those instances occur in span of a mere five verses (John 4:20-24). These usages (and that of John 12:20) all relate to Jerusalem as the place in which Jews worship God—the place of proskynesis. In John 9:38, however, Jesus is explicitly the object of *proskyneō*, when the man born

Luke reports that on one occasion Jesus was invited to dine at the house of one of the Pharisees. While he was reclining at dinner there, a woman, described by the Pharisee host as a sinner, “stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and *kissed his feet* and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37-38, emphasis added). Where Matthew puts tremendous emphasis on the cultic nature of the act, Luke repeatedly focuses on Jesus’s feet and thus on the theophanic nature of the experience. The Pharisee grumbles and tells himself that if Jesus had been a prophet he would have known she was a sinner, a reaction that occasions a parable from Jesus:

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. (Luke 7:41-45)

Simon’s gratitude is not unlike the servant in the parable of the 10,000-talent debt: perhaps his debt is smaller, but his ingratitude is greater (see Matthew 18:21-34). Simon neglects to perform basic

blind worships him. Mark uses the term twice, but ironically: Mark 5:6 describes a demoniac who worships Jesus, the unclean spirits within the demoniac essaying not to be cast out, and Mark 15:19 describes the mock worship (mocking proskynesis) of the Roman soldiers who abused Jesus in the Praetorium. For Luke’s usage, see, for example, *pesōn epi prosōpon* (“fall[ing] down upon [one’s] face”) (Luke 5:12); *pesōn para tous podas* (“fall[ing] down at [someone’s] feet”) (Luke 8:41); and a combination of these two, *epesen epi prosōpon para tous podas* (“[he] fell down on his face at his feet”) (Luke 17:16).

acts of hospitality, such as providing water for his guest's feet and giving a kiss of greeting. The woman, whom Simon calls a sinner, however, elevates these simple acts of hospitality to acts of worship, washing his feet with her own tears, using her own hair to wipe them, and repeatedly kissing, not merely his face, but his feet.

Thus Luke poignantly illustrates the love of God—Jesus's love for the woman as manifest in his forgiveness of her sins, and her reciprocal love for Jesus as manifest in worship. However, to conclude that Jesus forgives her sins *because* she kisses his feet is to misread the story. In the phrase *for she loved much* (Luke 7:47), the Greek conjunction *hoti*, translated “for” in the KJV, would be better translated “therefore” or “considering that.”⁸⁰ Thus the woman places herself at Jesus's feet, “weeping” and “wash[ing] his feet with tears,” and so forth (7:38) *because* he “frankly forgave” her in his infinite love and compassion (7:42). She showed her gratitude and reciprocated the Savior's love for her in the most direct way possible. Her physical proskynesis in kissing the feet of Jesus was a profound demonstration of the love of God and literally fulfilled the injunction of Psalm 2 to “kiss the Son” or even (in an emended reading) to “kiss his [Yahweh's] feet” (Psalm 2:12).

Like Matthew, Luke closes his gospel account with a proskynesis scene. Immediately following the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, at a time when the eleven were gathered together with some of the other disciples (cf. Luke 24:33), Jesus appeared in resurrected form. Nothing like this had *ever* happened, and Luke reports that the disciples “were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit” (Luke 24:37). Jesus then invites them to witness the “infallible proofs” (“sure signs,” Acts 1:3) of his resurrection: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). Because “they yet believed not for

80. See Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2007), 203. Perhaps the use of *hoti* here reflects an underlying Semitic idiom.

joy,” he ate “a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb” as a final proof (Luke 24:41-42).

Since his disciples are now witnesses of his resurrection (Luke 24:48), Jesus seals the “promise of [the] Father” upon them, which will include their being (literally) “endued [clothed] with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).⁸¹ Before separating from them, Jesus “led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them” (Luke 24:50), reminiscent of the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-27 (cf. Ben Sira 50:20-21). They experience Jesus in all of his divinity. When he is finally “carried up into heaven,” Luke reports that “they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:51-52). They acknowledged the resurrected Jesus’s divinity and revered him, just as they would the God of Israel in the temple. In fact, Luke’s concluding notice is that they “were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God”—clearly they wanted to remain in the Lord’s presence (Luke 24:53; cf. 3 Nephi 17:5).

“Worthy Is the Lamb”: Proskynesis in Revelation

As in Matthew’s gospel, *proskyneō* is also a *Leitwort* in the Apocalypse of John, occurring twenty-four times. Unlike Matthew, however, the focus here is not on Jesus’s earthly ministry but on what will occur at the end of time and in the eternities. Proskynesis in Revelation is rendered to the Lord, enthroned in celestial glory. Like Matthew, John uses the verb *proskyneō* to emphasize that Jesus is Yahweh, the Lord God, and to draw a sharp distinction between the worthy lamb to whom proskynesis is due, angels to whom proskynesis is not due, and the beast that threatens the damnation and destruction of those who render proskynesis to it.

In the book of Revelation, John enters heaven “in the spirit” (Revelation 4:2) and “finds himself in the throne-room of God,”⁸² the heavenly holy of holies. Here he sees “things which must be

81. Compare the expression *clothed with power* in D&C 45:44; 138:30.

82. Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 404.

hereafter” (Revelation 4:1), including twenty-four elders sitting upon twenty-four thrones. Evoking Isaiah’s throne vision, the four “beasts” or “living ones” are described as being like the seraphim (“burning ones”) of Isaiah 6:2, who burn with theophanic fire. Like the seraphim, they proclaim the *trishagion*—“Holy! Holy! Holy!” (Revelation 4:8; cf. Isaiah 6:3). But then John details a scene of proskynesis that is much more elaborate than Isaiah describes:

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders *fall down* before him that sat on the throne, and *worship* him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Revelation 4:9-11, emphasis added)

John describes what the cherubim atop the mercy-seat, and the mercy-seat itself, symbolize: angels and other beings in the heavenly realm “in the attitude of singing and praising their God” on his throne.⁸³ The difference between John’s vision and previous throne visions is that John sees other beings also enthroned. The enthroned elders are among those who “came out of great tribulation” in mortality (Revelation 7:14). They are enthroned and yet never cease to fall down in proskynesis before the Lord Jesus Christ, who is worthy of this reverence.

John then witnesses a similar scene of proskynesis in connection with the opening of the seven seals. He sees “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11; cf. Daniel 7:10)—in other words, “an innumerable company”⁸⁴ or “numberless concourses”⁸⁵ who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ as a sacrificial lamb. The Lamb is hailed as worthy be-

83. See 1 Nephi 1:8; Alma 36:22; cf. 1 Kings 22:19.

84. Hebrews 12:22; see also D&C 76:67; 138:12.

85. Again, borrowing the language of 1 Nephi 1:8 (Alma 36:22). Lehi also uses the phrase *numberless concourses* to describe the hosts of those who pass through mortality according to his vision (see 1 Nephi 8:21).

cause his redeeming blood has enabled this innumerable company to become “kings and priests” to God and “to reign on earth” (Revelation 5:9-10, 12). They too will be enthroned. Temple imagery again abounds in this chapter: the divine throne that evokes the ark of the covenant, the sacrificial lamb, the harps, incense and incense bowls, the prayers, and so forth.

John also notes that the beasts and the elders “fell down before the lamb” with their harps and the “prayers of the saints” in the form of incense (Revelation 5:8). The acclamation becomes universal: “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them” ascribe “blessing, and honour, and glory, and power” to God and the Lamb, whereupon “the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders *fell down and worshipped him* that liveth for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13-14). John emphasizes that it is God and the Lamb, not Caesar⁸⁶ or any other earthly ruler, who is worthy to be revered in this way, because the Lamb has redeemed numberless concourses out of every nation with his blood. It is this worthy lamb who will ultimately rule over all things. Christ’s rule will be universal and will be duly acknowledged with proskynesis.

In Revelation 7, even before Christ’s final victory, John again sees numberless concourses (“a great multitude, which no man could number”) assembled about God’s throne out of “all nations, and kindreds [i.e., races], and people, and tongues” who are “clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:9) in celebration of Christ’s imminent victory (cf. John 12:13; Mark 11:8-10). They ascribe salvation (i.e., victory) to God and Christ: “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10). In other words, “Hosanna to God and the Lamb.”⁸⁷ He then sees again the angels themselves “[*falling*] *on their faces*” and “*worship[ping] God*” (Revelation 7:11).

86. See Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation),” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1004.

87. See 3 Nephi 4:32; 11:17; John 12:13; Mark 11:9-10.

Ezekiel and Zechariah saw in vision the measuring of the temple and Jerusalem (see Ezekiel 40-42; 47:1-12; Zechariah 2:5-6). In Revelation 11:1, John is given the opportunity to participate as if he himself were a member of the divine council. He is given a measuring reed and instructed to “measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.” After yet other woes, John at last witnesses the final victory:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their [thrones], *fell upon their faces*, and *worshipped God*, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. (Revelation 11:15-17)

Again John sees that the twenty-four elders are themselves enthroned (cf. Revelation 3:21) and yet still give due reverence to Christ even as he gives due reverence (worship) to God the Father. They leave their thrones to fall down in proskynesis before the Father and the Son, presumably upon the new, celestialized earth.⁸⁸ For John, the proskynesis of the elders is the sure sign that Christ has fully taken power over the earth and that the devil and Israel’s other enemies (Death/Mot, Hell/Sheol, etc.) no longer have dominion at all. Christ is now fully divine and has put all enemies under foot.

When John sees an “angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6), he hears the angel “with a loud voice” command proskynesis before God to the world: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and *worship* him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Revelation 14:7).

88. See Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; and Revelation 21:1.

In Revelation 15 John incorporates allusions to the exodus, such as to plagues, to the Song of Moses, and to the paschal lamb. In addition to singing their own Song of Moses (Exodus 15), John foresees that those who overcome will sing the song of the lamb: “All nations shall come and *worship* before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:3-4). This song of the lamb quotes Psalm 86:9: “All nations whom thou hast made shall come and *worship* before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.”⁸⁹ The emphasis here is on the universality of the proskynesis wherewith Christ’s sovereignty over creation and the justice of his final judgment will be acknowledged.⁹⁰

The final major proskynesis scene in Revelation takes place after the Lord executes judgment upon “the great whore, [who] did corrupt the earth with her fornication” and “[did] avenge the blood of his servants” who were martyred: “And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and *worshipped God* that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia” (Revelation 19:2, 4). This proskynesis is a prelude to “the marriage supper of the Lamb,” where all the saints are united with Jesus, never again to be divided (19:9).

The other occurrences of *proskyneō* in Revelation contrast this licit proskynesis with illicit acts of worship. Revelation 13 describes proskynesis before “the beast” in antithesis to proskynesis before God and the Lamb (Revelation 13:4, 12, 15). Revelation 14:9-11, 16:2, and 19:20 describe the punishments in store for those who prostrate themselves before the beast or receive his mark. In contrast, John sees a glorious resurrection and enthronement as the reward for those who “had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark”—“they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). He also learns firsthand that

89. It may also allude to Isaiah 2:2 (“all nations shall flow unto it,” i.e., to the latter-day temple) and Jeremiah 16:19 (“the Gentiles [nations] shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth”).

90. See Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11.

proskynesis before anyone or anything other than God and the Lamb, even before angels, is forbidden (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).⁹¹

There is scarcely a more prominent theme in Revelation than proskynesis. One might even argue that the angel's command to John, "Worship God" (Revelation 19:10), sums up the message of the entire work. Whatever befalls the saints in mortality—persecution, suffering, temptation, war, or even martyrdom—if they will truly worship God and the Lamb, they will inherit thrones in God's kingdom. John reveals to his readers the glories reserved for the sanctified, inspiring them not just to endure, but to overcome,⁹² so that they might one day come forth and fall down and partake of the fruit of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:30).⁹³

Conclusion

The New Testament writers bear witness that a few special disciples, with great faith and insight, recognized divinity in the "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3) during his earthly ministry. They recognized him as the incarnate Yahweh, and approached him in proskynesis, as the hymns of the temple stipulated. They witnessed

91. Near the end of his vision, John indicates that he "fell at [the] feet" of his angelic guide "to *worship* him." The angel sharply admonishes him for this act: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God" (Revelation 19:10). John apparently had to learn the lesson twice: "And when I had heard and seen, *I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel* which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Revelation 22:8-9). Nephi reports that he had to teach his brothers this lesson: "And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they fell down before me, and were about to worship me, but I would not suffer them, saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee" (1 Nephi 17:55).

92. The verb *nikaō* ("overcome," "conquer," "prevail," "be victorious") occurs sixteen times in Revelation. It is, like *proskyneō*, a *Leitwort* in this work. Just as one must "worship" God and the Lamb rather than "the beast," one must "overcome" the devil "by the blood of the lamb" and by "testimony," and not to be overcome by him.

93. See Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14.

that the risen Christ was the divine king and high priest, whose coming the scriptures anticipated, when “they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him” (Matthew 28:9) and also “worshipped him” when he ascended into heaven (Luke 24:52). The New Testament writers—particularly Matthew, Luke, and John the Revelator—have given us a vivid picture of not only “what we worship” (John 4:22), but “how to worship,” that we “may come unto the Father . . . and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19).

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