

HABITATIONS OF PRAISE “The Use of Posture: Bow!”

Ps 95:6 “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;” NIV

*Though all attitudes of worship are valid, bowing seems to be the most solemn and submissive. It's almost as if standing and lifting hands is praise and bowing is worship (though not that clear cut). This is somewhat born out by the fact that a prominent word in the Hebrew that is translated as “praise” is **yadah**, which literally means to throw up the hands. The prominent Hebrew word translated worship (as in the verse above) is **shachah**, which means to bow down. We read these words in our English Bibles and lose the significance of the words. We think of worship as a concept instead of an action. We read, “let us worship,” where in the original language we would understand it to say, “let us lay prostrate in reverence.” The concept, the heart attitude, must find expression in posture and motion.*

*This verse in the 96th Psalm tells us to bow before our maker three times. It says to bow, **kara**’ – bend the knee; worship, **shacah** – to prostrate oneself; and kneel, **barak** – to kneel and bless (and be blessed). In his book Worship God!, Earnest Gentile documents seven different forms of bowing:*

- ◆ Bending both knees
- ◆ Bowing the head while standing
- ◆ Bowing at the waist while standing
- ◆ Bending over double
- ◆ Stooping with one knee bent
- ◆ Prostrating oneself spread eagle on the ground
- ◆ Kneeling on both knees and putting the face to the ground¹

He states:

“Western Christianity tends to associate faith and worship with an intellectual pursuit rather than an activity. In reality, faith and worship involve bodily actions as well as the mind and spirit. The church definitely needs to harmonize its liturgical feeling and the kinetic expression of that feeling. To restrict emotional involvement and body movements renders worship sterile . . . Luther commented that God gave man five senses with which to worship, and using less shows sheer ingratitude.”²

The importance of bowing down may be seen in its negative uses in Scripture. Often, it speaks of what we are not to bow down to.

Ex 20:4-5

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

¹ Earnest Gentile, *Worship God!*, Bible Temple Publishing, Portland, OR, 1994, p. 194

² *ibid.*, p. 194-195

5 You shall not **bow down**³ to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, NIV

Jehovah-qanna'-

Ex 34:14

Do not **worship**³ any other god, for the LORD, whose name is **Jealous**⁵, is a jealous God. NIV

Brown-Driver-Briggs' definition-

OT:7067 - **qanna**⁵-- jealous (only of God)

Make no mistake, bowing is not just some religious show of times past that we can afford to do without in our day and age. Bowing is an attitude of worship commanded by God and exhibited by the patriarchs and the saints.

Abraham-

Gen 18:1-2

1 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and **bowed low**³¹ to the ground. NIV

Gen 22:5

He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will **worship**³ and then we will come back to you." NIV

*"Bowed low" and "worship" are the same word in Hebrew, **shachah**. When Abraham saw the Lord approach him at Mamre, he responded appropriately. He bowed low to the ground. Notice that he uses this term to describe what he was going to do on Mount Moriah. The sacrifice of his son was going to be an act of bowing down before God. We should never forget that worship is a sacrifice.*

David-

1 Chron 16:7, 28-31

7 That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the LORD:

28 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,

29 ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; **worship**³ the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

30 Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.

31 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!" NIV

1 Chron 29:20

Then David said to the whole assembly, "Praise the LORD your God." So they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; **they bowed low**⁴ and **fell prostrate**³ before the LORD and the king. NIV

The Temple dedication-

2 Chron 7:3-4

3 When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, **they knelt on the pavement**⁴ with their faces to the ground, and they **worshiped**³ and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. NIV

Hezekiah-

2 Chron 29:27-29

27 Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel.

28 The whole assembly **bowed in worship**³, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.

29 When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him **knelt down**⁴ [*KJV* – *bowed their heads*] and **worshiped**³. NIV

Ezra-

Neh 8:6

Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they **bowed down**⁴ and **worshiped**³ the LORD with their faces to the ground. NIV

When our body is involved in worship, it is difficult to get bored or sleepy. All these changes of activity, lifting hands, standing, kneeling, bowing, express the different attitudes of our hearts and keep us involved in our worship of God.

Paul and the saints-

Acts 20:32-36

32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. NIV

What kinds of mental attitudes does the posture of bowing help build in our hearts or help us to express?

1) Bowing shows humility-

Judg 11:35

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! **thou hast brought me very low**¹, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. KJV

Judges 11:35 shows that bowing is a position of humility and lowliness. This is what we are saying to God (and to ourselves) when we bow. We are humbling ourselves before Him.

1 Kings 8:54

And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from **kneeling**¹ on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. KJV

King Solomon humbled himself before all Israel by kneeling on a stage of brass. Following are some observations of Kevin Connor with regard to this brazen scaffold.

1. It was made of brass. Brass is the symbol of judgment against sin and self. When we kneel to pray, we need to deal with these issues in our hearts.
2. The scaffold was the same size as the brazen altar in the Tabernacle of Moses [Ex. 27:1-8 with 2 Chr. 6:12-13]. Unwilling animals were sacrificed by willing priests on that altar. Here, Solomon offers himself as a living sacrifice. When we kneel to pray and worship, we need to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. "The external must symbolize the internal or else all is but formal ceremonialism."³
3. Solomon's positions of prayer: standing, kneeling, and outstretched hands. His whole body said surrender.

2 Kings 1:1-15

1 After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel.

2 Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury."

3 But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?'

4 Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'" So Elijah went.

5 When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you come back?"

6 "A man came to meet us," they replied. "And he said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, "This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending men to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'" "

7 The king asked them, "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?"

8 They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

³ Kevin Connor, *The Temple of Solomon*, Bible Temple Publishing, Portland, Oregon, 1988, p. 189

- 9 Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'"
- 10 Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.
- 11 At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says, 'Come down at once!'"
- 12 "If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.
- 13 So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and **fell**¹ on his knees before Elijah. "Man of God," he begged, "please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants!"
- 14 See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!"
- 15 The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king. NIV

The above narrative demonstrates dramatically how kneeling shows humbleness. The fire of God did not consume this captain. In addition to that, the captain in essence was interceding for his men. They were not consumed either. Leaders have a responsibility for their people. We can lead them to destruction or intercede for their salvation.

2) Bowing shows submission-

Job 1:20-21

- 20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in **worship**³
- 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." NIV

After all Job had heard and gone through, do you think he was really in the mood to worship God? Even so, he willingly submits himself to the purposes of God in his life. He praises the Lord, recognizing Him as the provider of all things and as such, the One who has the ultimate right to take it all away.

2 Sam 22:40

For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me **hast thou subdued**¹ under me. KJV

Phil 2:5-11

- 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should **bow**², in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. NIV

Bowing the knee to Jesus is to the glory of God!

Josh 5:13-15

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"
14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in **reverence**³ [*KJV – worship*], and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"
15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. NIV

2) **Bowing is the proper posture before the King-**

Ps 22:27-29

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto Jehovah; and all the kindreds of the nations shall **worship**³ [NIV – bow down] before thee.
28 For the kingdom is Jehovah's; and he is the ruler over the nations.
29 All the fat ones of the earth shall eat and **worship**³: all they that go down to the dust shall **bow**¹ before him, even he that cannot keep his soul alive. ASV

Ps 72:8-11

8 He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts.
11 All kings will **bow down**¹ to him and all nations will serve him. NIV

All will bow down before him because he is the King of kings!

Matt 2:2, 11

2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to **worship**⁶ him."
11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and **worshiped**⁶ him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. NIV

4) **Bowing is the posture of confession (contriteness)-**

Ezra 9:5-6

5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and **fell**¹ on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God

6 and prayed: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. NIV

Rom 14:10-12

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall **bow**² to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. KJV

When we kneel before God, we should be reminded to give an account of ourselves to Him. We have all heard of keeping short accounts with God. Examination of our lives and confession of our sins should be a constant part of our prayer lives.

5) Bowing is the occupation of heaven-

Rev 7:11-12

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and **worshipped**⁶ God,

12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" NIV

Ps 132:7-10

7 Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us **worship**³ at His footstool.

8 Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.

9 Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, And let Your saints shout for joy.

10 For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed. NKJV

Amen!

ⁱ Numbers on bolded words refer to Hebrew or Greek words. These are 1-kara', 2-kamptoo, 3-shachah, 4-qadad, 5-qanna, 6-proskuneo. The other number notations are footnotes