

Praise, Worship, and the Presence of God – Sample

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Dr. Stephen R. Crosby

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The first issue to confront the apostles after Christ's resurrection, particularly in their interaction with the Jews, was how to relate to the Old Testament Scriptures. The first century squabbles with the Jews were all hermeneuticalⁱ fights. The apostles had the unenviable task of trying to claim continuity with the old order and differentiation from it at the same time. It wasn't easy then, it's not easy now.

The Jews took strong objection to how the apostles went about this with non-literal interpretations and applications. This issue was controversial then, and remains so now. There was and is, a wide spectrum of passionate opinion on this topic. Much depends on how it's answered. Indeed, *everything* depends on the answer to this question: "How do we interpret and apply the Old Covenant Scriptures in the New Covenant era?"

For example, in Acts 13:32-33, Paul states that the promise made to the fathers *has been fulfilled* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is a spiritual and non-literal interpretation of the Old Covenant promises. We either accept that, or we don't, but whatever we decide will have far reaching consequences one way or the other.

It's a fact that neither the angels from heaven, nor John the Baptist, nor Jesus, nor any of the apostles handled Old Covenant prophetic Scriptures literally. Psalm 2, Psalm 110,ⁱⁱ Isaiah 7, Isaiah 9, Isaiah 53, Joel 2, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, Malachi 4, etc., were all handled non-literally.

The entire legitimacy of Christianity depends on accepting a non-literal interpretive perspective on Old Testament prophetic Scripture. Those who were the most committed to conservative literalism regarding prophetic Scripture were the opponents of the apostles. The apostles' hermeneutics nearly got them killed.

We either accept that the apostles were functioning under a unique revelatory grace, or we do not. We either accept that the apostolic revelation and application of Old Covenant Scripture takes interpretive precedence over biblical literalism, or we do not.

If rigid literalism is to be insisted upon, dear reader you need read no further. Nothing I say herein will persuade you from your presently held convictions. If literalism is required we all should convert to Judaism, because it's right after all. It's impossible to be a Christian (with understanding) and an inflexible prophetic literalist at the same time. It cannot be done, and attempts to do so will result in strange and confused mixtures of beliefs and practices.ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul hung the whole future of Christianity on a hermeneutical point of grammar: the letter "s." If the "seed" of Galatians 3:14-18 is "seeds" (plural/many), then we all should be Jewish. If it's singular, than our faith is legitimate. This is one highly nuanced interpretation! It's a spiritual and non-literal interpretation of the Abrahamic promise. He was saying that the promise biological relationship to the promise to Abraham is the Paul's hermeneutics almost got him killed. He wasn't theirs through their Abraham. The fulfillment of indwelling Holy Spirit. This is also spiritual and non-literal. Paul's non-literal hermeneutics got him lowered over a wall in a basket trying to escape a "hit" that had been ordered on him! It might get us slandered by hyper-literalists.

Yes friends, hermeneutics matters. Or, as Gordon Fee says: "It's all hermeneutics."^{iv}

I can feel the hands reaching for the stones at this moment, while shouting at me: "Replacement Theologian!"^v It is not Replacement Theology to interpret and apply the

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Scriptures consistently with the apostles. Taking the kingdom from the nation of Israel and giving it to another nation^{vi} is not anti-Semitic Replacement Theology. It's the gospel. The other nation is not the Gentile church. It is the One New Man nation, Jew and Gentile in Messiah. With this understanding, let's look at some key texts regarding the nature of the praise and worship, from a new covenant perspective.

I am one of what seems to be a dying breed these days, who believes that the Scriptures mean what the apostles said they mean, and that the cultural context, and the scriptural context are critical to accurate understanding and contemporary application of any biblical passage.

If we choose to let go of these principles, we might as well just shut our Bibles now and make it up as we go along, because anything that anybody, "feels in his/her heart," or has a proof-text for, becomes true and we are full-slide into spiritual relativism.^{vii} So, since the entire premise of restored Davidic worship rises or falls on interpreting Amos 9:11, let's consider how the apostles interpreted the verse as well as some cultural and contextual background.

ⁱ The science and art of interpretation.

ⁱⁱ These two passages are the most quoted Old Covenant Scriptures in the New Testament used by the apostles to justify the legitimacy of faith in Christ as Messiah. They are the scriptural foundation of the New Testament.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are some voices within the so-called "Jewish Roots" movement that teach the New Covenant promise was not given to the Gentiles, but the Jews, and the way the Gentiles must access the promise is to come back into a Messianic form of Judaism. This is based on a strictly literal reading of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. The only problem is, the apostles did not handle those passages that way . . . neither should we. Some in an extreme form of Dispensationalism have gone so far as to teach that there are two plans of salvation, one for the obedient Jew, and one for the Gentile church. It is as logically honest as it is misinformed.

^{iv} Gordon Fee. *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*. Peabody: Hendrickson. 1991. 24.

^v The teaching that the Gentile church "replaced" the covenant promises made to the Jews, the remedy of which is a form of Jewish Roots theology. This is the belief that the church has been horribly Hellenized and must return to its Jewish roots and practices to make God happy. I cannot unpack all that issue here except to say read Romans 9-11 carefully. The church does not have its "roots" in Judaism. Both Israel and the Gentiles are BRANCHES. The root for both is faith in Messiah. The One New Man is not made up of Gentiles trying to live like Jews, observing Jewish laws and practices as if the councils in Acts 11 and 15 never took place.

^{vi} Matt. 21:43 – clearly, some privilege is being "moved" from one "people" to another. There is another "nation."

^{vii} This problem plagues some forms of emergent and house church expressions.