

THE ORDER OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

1. OLD TESTAMENT PATTERNS FOR THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

Major events of covenant making in the Old Testament (particularly the covenant ceremony on Mt. Sinai) are embodied and renewed in the Old Testament liturgy of sacrifices (Exod. 29:1–28; Lev. 8; Lev 9; Num. 6:16–17; 2 Chron. 5–7; 2 Chron. 29:20–36; Ezek. 43:19–27) with a consistent order or sequence of actions.¹

Mt. Sinai Liturgy: Covenant Formation [Exodus 24:4–11]	Sanctuary Liturgy of Sacrifices: Covenant Renewal	Theological Meaning
	Call to assemble at the Tabernacle (Lev. 9:1–6; 2 Chron. 29:20)	God CALLS his people into his special presence
PURIFICATION (24:6) • Display of blood	PURIFICATION Offering Focus: display of blood (Lev. 9:8–11; 2 Chron. 29:21–24)	- Enacted CONFESSION of sin - Purification from defilement and FORGIVENESS for sin's guilt
ASCENSION via God's word (24:7) - Moses ascends to receive and deliver the word given from heaven at the summit of Mt. Sinai. - This word embodies God's presence brought near to the people (i.e., a kind of indirect spiritual "ascent") - This word summons the people to total consecration and commitment to God OATH of commitment in response to God's word (24:7–8)	ASCENSION Offering Focus: Whole animal cut up, completely burned, and transformed into smoke. (Lev. 9:12–16; 2 Chron. 29:25–34) Combined with ministry of the WORD and PRAYER spoken and sung in Joshua 8:30–35 and 2 Chronicles 5–7. TRIBUTE Offering Focus: offering bread and wine with incense on the altar (Lev. 9:17)	TRANSFORMATION by God's presence and glory - Spiritual "ASCENSION/ACCESS" in worship to God's presence in the heaven/garden/Sinai sanctuary - Expression of total consecration and COMMITMENT to God. (All three aspects are associated with READING AND INSTRUCTION IN GOD'S WORD.) - Expression of renewed commitment to God and consecration by God symbolized by the ascension offering: - Offering tokens of WORK/MONEY to support the priests and the rest of the poor - Offering of PRAYERS [Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4]
MEAL with God in his presence (24:9–11)	PEACE Offering (MEAL) Focus: eating the meat of the sacrifice together with God. (Lev. 9:18–21; 2 Chron. 29:35)	- Joyful celebration of peace, communion, and fellowship with God by means of a FESTIVE SACRIFICIAL MEAL. - Thanksgiving
	BENEDICTION (Lev. 9:22–23)	God BLESSES his people

¹ On 2 Chron 5–7, see <http://peterwallace.org/sermons/2chron5.txt>. On Exodus 24, see <http://peterwallace.org/sermons/ex20.htm>.

2. THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation describes a vision that occurred on the Lord's Day and that reveals numerous scenes of worship in heaven throughout the book. Furthermore, the heavenly setting and the worship that occurs there is described with explicit Temple imagery (8:1–3; 11:19; 16:1, 17).

New Covenant Accomplished in Christ	New Covenant Enacted in Worship: Christian Worship in Christ (Present and Future) (Adapted from http://peterwallace.org/sermons/rev4.txt)
	Assembling for Worship (Rev. 4:1–11) The heavenly hosts as they assemble to praise their God.
Jesus' Death	PURIFICATION Offering (Rev. 5:1–7) John weeps because no one is worthy to open the scroll. The scroll contains the purposes of God for history. Sin seems to have caused history to come to a screeching halt. Redemptive history itself can only continue through the sacrifice. Only the Lamb of God who was slain is worthy to proclaim the purposes of God for his people. John is assured that Jesus has triumphed!
	Psalm of Praise (Rev. 5:9–14) The people of God declare the praises of the Lamb for the great redemption which he has wrought.
Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven → sending of the Holy Spirit to call and empower the church	WORD of God from heaven read and preached, PRAYER of the covenant community, Fire consuming the sacrifices/glory filling the temple, Praise in song This pattern of proclaiming God's word from the heavenly throne of the Lamb and the corporate response of the people of God repeats four times. Each pattern of "sevens" in Revelation follows this same order. • Rev. 6:1–8:5 <i>The Seven Seals proclaim the Word of God</i> 7:9–8:4 reports the praises and prayers of the saints. 8:5 reports the fire from heaven in reply. • Rev. 8:6–11:19 <i>The Seven Trumpets proclaim the Word of God</i> 11:15–18 reports the prayers of the saints. 11:19 says that the temple of God was opened in heaven, bringing lightning and thunder upon the earth. • Rev. 12:1–15:8 <i>The Seven Signs proclaim the Word of God</i> 15:2–4 reports the song of Moses (the prayer of the saints) 15:5–8 reports that the glory of the Lord so filled the heavenly temple that no one was able to enter the temple until the plagues were done. • Rev. 16:1–21 <i>The Seven Bowls proclaim the Word of God</i> 16:17–18 reports the fire that comes from heaven. 17:1–19:5 describes the effect of the seventh bowl and God's remembering of Babylon in judgment (16:19). 19:1–5 reports the praises of the saints for such a great salvation.
Jesus' return (the marriage supper of the Lamb)	The PEACE Offering (Rev. 19:6–10) Saints are welcomed to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb for their ultimate blessing.
	BLESSING (Rev. 21–22) The ultimate blessing of God for his people.

3. HISTORIC CHRISTIAN LITURGIES

All examples of Christian liturgies prior to the Protestant Reformation share a common framework for the order of service.

Entrance
Confession and forgiveness of sins
Reading of Scripture (for instruction and sermon)
Preaching/teaching of scripture
Professing our faith (creed)
Praying (interceding) for the church and the world
Offering in gifts and song
Communion
God's blessing and sending

While abandoned by some Protestants, this classic Christian order of worship has been maintained in Orthodox, Catholic, and liturgically conservative Protestant traditions (Lutheran and the early Reformed churches) and recovered by participants in modern liturgical movements, including Methodist, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches returning to their early liturgical roots.

4. THE PRACTICAL, GOSPEL LOGIC FOR BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL PATTERNS

(1) Entrance: God calls us to worship, and we responds with joy.

- God's sovereign initiative: The liturgy begins with an imperative/summons from God because our worship and relationship with God is always a result of and response to God's sovereign, gracious initiative and movement toward us.
- Our acceptance by grace: As God's people, we draw near to God on the basis of an already existing relationship with God in Christ. We enter into God's presence with joy because we are already members of his beloved family accepted by grace and indwelt by his Spirit. Even though we have sins to confess, we initially approach God with joy because we know that he draws near in order to forgive us, heal us, and bless us anew.

(2) We confess our sin, and God forgives us.

Confessing our sins to God and receiving afresh God's forgiveness in Christ remove the relational barriers to relationship with God that we bring with us to corporate worship. For those who come to worship weighed down with feelings of guilt, shame, and frustration from whatever happened during the week (or even in the car on the way to church!), it is very helpful to begin with confession, to wipe the slate clean, and to have God reaffirm our standing before him in Christ as forgiven and beloved sons and daughters. And we respond with the only fitting response to God's gracious forgiveness and affirmation of our acceptance in Christ: exuberant praise and thanks in song!

(3) God instructs us from his word

God gives us the gifts of forgiveness and acceptance in Jesus Christ for the larger purpose of giving us access to life with God and to God's work of transforming us more deeply into the likeness of Christ. Having been forgiven by God and reaffirmed in our standing with God as beloved sons and daughters,

we are ready to receive God's instruction as the wisdom of a kind, loving Father rather than a condemning Judge.

The Scripture reading and sermon are not merely words about God; rather, through these means God himself speaks to us to teach us his wisdom. Because listening to God is an act of communion with God, we pray beforehand to confess our need for God to work in us by his Holy Spirit to understand and respond rightly.

(4) We respond to the ministry of the word in offering and prayers of petition.

God instructs us in worship not only for our information but also for our transformation. Therefore, the proper response to receiving God's instruction is to act with renewed commitment to love God and obey his word. The liturgy provides an opportunity for the church to begin doing this in a unified way as a body in the offering and our prayers of petition.

- **Offering:**

- When positioned after the sermon, the offering functions as a tangible way of offering our whole self and our whole life to God in response to the sermon not only in words (prayers in song) but also in deeds (offerings of our work and wealth).
- In order to communicate that the offering is a way of giving our whole life to God, we sing during the collection with a song that interprets and articulates the specific applications of the sermon in offering ourselves to God in renewed commitment and love.

- **Prayers of petition**

- Time for response: Having corporate prayers of petition after the sermon creates a space for congregational response to receiving the word of God. Rather than moving quickly on to the end of the service, a time of prayer by the congregation allows us some time to process the word we have received and to respond to God's word by speaking back to him.
- Putting the sermon into action: When prayers of petition follow the sermon, then the reading(s) and sermon can inform the content of the prayers. By praying with the specific language and themes of the Scriptures read and preached, God teaches how to pray from his word, and we publicly and corporately begin to respond to God's instruction with new obedience by asking for God's will to be done in our lives in all the particular ways that we have just been called to live from his word.
- Obeying by grace: By responding to God's instruction with prayer, we acknowledge our dependence upon the grace of God to empower us to follow him.

(5) The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is the most fitting way to end the liturgy since it is a joyful meal that celebrates the communion with God renewed through all the prior events in the liturgy. This is the culmination of the progression toward intimate, whole-bodied communion and friendship with God.

(6) Blessing and Sending

The liturgy fittingly concludes with God's blessing not only as a conclusion and summary of what he has accomplished for us in the liturgy of corporate worship but also as a final word that sends us forth into the rest of life to serve the mission of his kingdom in God's love and strength.