

1:23). D.A. Carson, commenting on the scene of Matthew 9:5-7—where Yeshua both heals a paralytic *and* forgives him of sins, and is also accused of blasphemy<sup>23</sup> (discussed further)—regards this as a significant example of the Messiah being Immanuel/Emmanuel: “The healing...showed that Jesus truly had authority to forgive sins....This is the authority of Emmanuel, ‘God with us’ (1:23), sent to ‘save his people from their sins’ (1:21)...[T]he healing not only cured the paralytic (v.7), it also assured him that his sins were forgiven and refuted the charge of blasphemy.”<sup>24</sup>

Stephen J. Wellum, noting this same scene (Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26), makes the keen points, “all this takes place *outside* the temple so that Jesus is signifying that forgiveness of sin, now that he has come at this point in redemptive history, is found in him alone. After all, he is the one to which the entire old covenant pointed in its priesthood, sacrificial system, and entire temple structure. Jesus’ claim then, set within the storyline of Scripture, is an explicit claim of deity.”<sup>25</sup> His point should be well taken, as Yeshua claiming that forgiveness from sins would be available in Him, would be considered blasphemy not only against God—if He was just a normal human with God’s special presence in Him, and/or a created supernatural agent sent from Heaven as a human. The poignancy of Yeshua committing blasphemy is raised with an operating sacrificial service at the Temple in Jerusalem also present, for which some degree of forgiveness was accessible before God.

Yeshua saving people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), and being titled as “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), is something demonstrated in the significant examples of the Messiah offering a permanent forgiveness to people—and is something that no human agent or supernatural agent is capable of performing. **Only God can do this.**

Those of us who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, though, should not just take it as blind dogma. We are bid by the angel who announced His birth, “A Savior is born to you today in the city of David, who is Messiah the Lord” (Luke 2:10, TLV). Who this Savior is, Messiah the Lord, is why we search the Scriptures, evaluating the testimony recorded of Him.

## Matthew 2:1-12

### “Yeshua the Child Worshipped by the Magi”

“Now after Yeshua was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: “AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL”’ [Micah 5:2]. Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.’ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. When they saw the star,

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<sup>23</sup> “And some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This fellow blasphemes’...‘Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, pick up your bed and go home.’ And he got up and went home” (Matthew 9:3, 5-7).

<sup>24</sup> D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:222.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, “The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Deity of Christ*, 88.

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they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.”

Subsequent to the birth of the child Yeshua, the Gospel of Matthew narrates, “Now after the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem in Judea, in the days of King Herod, astrologers from the east arrived at Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1, Goodspeed New Testament). While questions persist as to the exact identity of these persons, the magi were probably Persian magicians or astrologers, who knew something about the anticipated Messiah, by the Eastern Diaspora Jewish community. They arrive in Jerusalem and go to King Herod, who was disturbed as to why they had come (Matthew 2:3-4). The religious leaders make an appeal to Micah 5:2 (addressed previously), which specifies that the Messiah will come out of the town of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6). The three wise men go to Bethlehem to encounter the infant Yeshua, and they present Him with various gifts (Matthew 2:9-11), later departing (Matthew 2:12).

The scene of the three magi or wise men is well known to Bible readers, and questions are certainly raised about the Messiahship of Yeshua from the Tanach from this scene. Questions are also raised about the nature of Yeshua from this scene, as both the magi and King Herod intend to direct some kind of reverence to this infant (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11). The verb that is used to describe this reverence is *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω). Scholars William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, in their Greek-English Dictionary provided for *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)*, offer the following definitions for *proskuneō*: “to do reverence or homage by kissing the hand”; “to do reverence or homage by prostration”; “to pay divine homage, worship, adore.”<sup>26</sup> Most of today’s major English Bible versions (i.e., NASB, RSV/ESV, NIV, HCSB) render *proskuneō* in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11 with “worship.”

Not all English versions render *proskuneō* as “worship” in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11, as the NRSV has “pay/paid him homage,” and the Common English Bible employs “honor(ed) him.” Major Messianic versions such as the CJB/CJSB and TLV employ “worship” for these verses, but when some other versions seen within various Messianic and Hebrew/Hebraic Roots sectors are encountered, it is easily detected that there is not agreement within our broad faith community as to what kind of veneration was to be directed toward Yeshua:

- Matthew 2:2: *kai ēlthomen proskunēsai autō* (καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ); “and we came to pay homage to Him” (Power New Testament); “and have come to do reverence to Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009); “and have come to bow down to him” (The Messianic Writings).
- Matthew 2:8: *hopōs kagō elthōn proskunēsō autō* (ὅπως κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ); “then when I come I will pay homage to Him” (Power New Testament); “so that I too might go and do reverence to Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009); “so that I also may come and bow down to him” (The Messianic Writings).
- Matthew 2:11: *kai pesontes prosekunēsan autō* (καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ); “and having fallen to their knees they paid homage to Him” (Power New Testament); “and fell down and did reverence to Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009); “and they fell down and bowed down before him” (The Messianic Writings).

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<sup>26</sup> William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1152.

From a lexical standpoint, the verb *proskuneō* appearing in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11 can be rendered as either “worship,” or the alternatives “bow down” or “do reverence.” It is to be recognized that the First Commandment (Exodus 20:1-4; Deuteronomy 5:6-9) prohibits worship or veneration of any being or entity other than the LORD God of Israel. To “worship” a being that is not God is to commit idolatry, and so “worship” of Yeshua the Messiah is often taken to be evidence that He is to be treated as genuinely God. So, do alternative renderings of *proskuneō* in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11 indicate that some hold to a low Christology of Yeshua not being God? Not necessarily. The verb *proskuneō* can imply expressing some degree of honor or prostration of a human subject to a human king, and various commentators of the Gospel of Matthew—who actually do believe that Yeshua is God—have noted that from the perspective of the characters in this scene, King Herod and the three magi, they may have not intended to “worship” the infant Yeshua.

In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (2007), R.T. France notes how the veneration in view was commonly directed toward royal figures, and that “worship” may not have been intended from the magi toward Yeshua. France also raises the point that the readers of Matthew’s Gospel, though, would have probably concluded that more than just “prostration” is to be taken from this scene:

“The nature of the ‘homage’ of the magi (the verb recurs in vv. 8 and 11) is not clearly spelled out, except for the offering of expensive gifts, such as might befit a royal birth. Their ‘prostration’ (v. 11; literally ‘falling’) was a familiar act of homage in Eastern society, a recognition of social superiority. Neither term requires the attribution of divinity to the one so honored, and Matthew’s narrative does not indicate that the magi had any such notion (they came looking for a ‘king,’ not a ‘god’), though he might expect his Christian readers with hindsight to read more into the ‘worship’ of the magi.”<sup>27</sup>

John Nolland supports the rendering “do obeisance” for *proskuneō*, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, for this scene at least, recognizing the perspective of the participants, who probably did not intend to direct religious veneration toward the infant Yeshua. Nolland does, however, recognize future uses of *proskuneō* in Matthew to denote not just religious worship, but worship directed toward the Messiah. In his estimation,

“προσκυνεῖν [*proskunein*] is used of the Magi’s intentions when they find the one to be king of the Jews...[I]n Matthew it can mean reverence (4:9, 10), at times seems to clearly involve (religious) worship directed towards Jesus (14:33; 28:9, 17), and is used repeatedly of Jesus from infancy onwards in a manner which seems designed to blur, in the case of response to Jesus, the distinction between deferential respect and religious worship. In the case of the Magi the translation ‘to do obeisance’ is intended to mark this ambiguity.”<sup>28</sup>

Donald A. Hagner addresses how one would normally expect *proskuneō* in this scene to involve paying homage, and not too much worship. He indicates that readers of Matthew’s Gospel on the whole, should actually recognize that the magi’s honor of the infant Yeshua, had a greater significance, that they themselves did not fully know—namely that their actions are to be regarded as a form of worship:

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<sup>27</sup> R.T. France, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 69.

<sup>28</sup> John Nolland, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 111.

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“The most natural meaning of προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ [*proskunēsai autō*] in the historical setting (with the reference to a king) is ‘to pay homage to him.’ ‘To worship him’ may also be used in the looser sense, referring to the divinity claimed by ancient monarchs. But Matthew’s readers know the real meaning of what the magi have come to do better than the magi themselves knew, namely, ‘worship’ in its proper sense. That is, Jesus is the manifestation of God’s presence (1:23), the son of God (2:15) in a unique sense, and thus one to be worshiped.”<sup>29</sup>

Morris, an evangelical Christian theologian, also addresses the historical reality of how the three magi may themselves have only intended to bow down or revere the infant Yeshua—but that from the perspective of the Gospel of Matthew, their honor is to be considered worship:

“They say that they have come *to worship him*, where the verb may indicate an act of reverence toward a great man or an act of worship of God. The Magi probably intended it as an act of homage, but Matthew may well be giving the expression its fullest meaning—the attitude of the Magi in the presence of the Baby was the attitude proper in the presence of God. The worship of Christ was important to Matthew, and he refers to this worship 10 times (2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17).”<sup>30</sup>

Lexically speaking in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11 the verb *proskuneō* can be translated as either “worship,” or an alternative such as “bow down.” Historically speaking, it is doubtful that the three magi or King Herod actually intended to “worship” the infant Yeshua as some kind of supernatural being. Instead, it is probable that they simply intended to pay their respects to the infant Yeshua, as they would to a newly born prince. Yet, in light of other uses of the verb *proskuneō* appearing in the Apostolic Writings (discussed further)—where religious veneration of Yeshua the Messiah is unambiguously intended—it is correct and proper to translate *proskuneō* as “worship” in Matthew 2:2, 8, 11. It is also correct and proper for us to conclude that *any form of honor* directed to Yeshua—regardless of the specific intentions of the person or entity expressing such honor—can be retroactively classified as “worship.” The *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* concurs in its Glossary entry for “worship,”

“Reverent honor paid to God, which is right, or to satan and false gods, which is wrong. (See Matthew 4:10; Mark 7:6; Luke 4:7; John 4:22.) The word can also mean paying homage or bowing down, as when people worshiped *Yeshua* even before they fully understood who He is (See Matthew 2:11; Mark 15:19, in mockery; John 9:38.)”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Vol 33a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant*, pp 509-510.