



## Glossary: The Communion of Saints and the Worship of Heaven

### Terms relating to the communion of saints

| Term                                      | Meaning and significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Key Scriptures                          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>Communion of saints</b>                | The shared life of all who belong to Christ, including believers on earth and the faithful departed with the Lord. It describes fellowship <b>in Christ</b> , not the worship of saints. The expression appears in the Apostles' Creed; its biblical foundation includes the heavenly assembly described in Hebrews. | Hebrews 12:22–24; Apostles' Creed.      |
| <b>Communion — <i>koinōnia</i></b>        | A Greek word meaning <b>fellowship, sharing, or participation</b> . Christian communion is more than companionship: it is participation in Christ and the blessings he gives. Paul uses this word when speaking of participation in Christ's body and blood at the Lord's Table.                                     | 1 Corinthians 10:16–17.                 |
| <b>Saints — <i>hagioi</i></b>             | The plural of Greek <i>hagios</i> , meaning <b>holy</b> or <b>set apart</b> . When applied to Christians, it identifies people who belong to God through Christ. The New Testament does not restrict the term to exceptionally distinguished Christians or those who have died.                                      | 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1.       |
| <b>One Body of Christ</b>                 | The Church understood as a people united in Christ rather than merely a collection of religious individuals. Paul connects sharing in the one bread with belonging to the one body. Communion therefore carries responsibilities of mutual love and care.                                                            | 1 Corinthians 10:16–17.                 |
| <b>Church — <i>ekklēsia</i></b>           | A Greek word meaning <b>assembly</b> or <b>congregation</b> . In Christian usage, it refers to God's people, not primarily their building. Hebrews places the Church within the larger description of the heavenly gathering.                                                                                        | Hebrews 12:23.                          |
| <b>Heavenly Jerusalem / Mount Zion</b>    | Names used in Hebrews for the heavenly city and assembly into which believers have been brought through Jesus. These expressions identify our relationship to God's heavenly people and promises, not merely a future geographical destination.                                                                      | Hebrews 12:22–24.                       |
| <b>Festal assembly — <i>panēgyris</i></b> | A Greek term for a <b>celebratory gathering</b> . It appears in Hebrews' description of the heavenly assembly. The word contributes a sense of joyful gathering, not merely an administrative meeting or a solemn courtroom.                                                                                         | Hebrews 12:22–23.                       |
| <b>The perfected righteous</b>            | Hebrews describes righteous people brought to perfection in God's presence. This should be distinguished from the future resurrection of the body: Christian hope includes bodily resurrection, not an everlasting existence as disembodied spirits.                                                                 | Hebrews 12:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. |
| <b>Cloud of witnesses</b>                 | The faithful people whose lives bear witness to trusting God, especially those described in Hebrews 11. Their example encourages our perseverance. The passage does not establish that departed believers observe every detail of our lives.                                                                         | Hebrews 11; 12:1–2.                     |
| <b>Martyrs</b>                            | People killed because of their faithfulness to God and their testimony. Revelation portrays martyrs alive before God, praying for justice and awaiting the completion of his purposes. They are neither forgotten nor outside his care.                                                                              | Revelation 6:9–11.                      |

| Term                     | Meaning and significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Key Scriptures     |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Bride of the Lamb</b> | A picture of Christ's people in their covenant relationship with him. The marriage celebration emphasizes belonging, faithfulness, joy, and the fulfillment of redemption. Heavenly worship is personal communion, not merely a magnificent performance. | Revelation 19:7–9. |

**Teaching application:** The word *communion* should enlarge both our hope and our love. We belong to a people greater than our own congregation, generation, culture, or preferred style of worship.

## 2. The persons and figures surrounding God's throne

| Term                          | Meaning and significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Key Scriptures                                 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The throne of God</b>      | The central sign of God's sovereign rule. Heavenly worship is organized around God's authority and glory, not around the importance of the worshipers.                                                                                                                              | Revelation 4:2–11.                             |
| <b>The Lamb</b>               | Jesus Christ, portrayed as slain yet standing and victorious. His sacrificial death and redeeming work explain why he receives heaven's worship. The redeemed fellowship exists because of him.                                                                                     | Revelation 5:5–10.                             |
| <b>Angels / heavenly host</b> | God's heavenly servants who participate in his praise. Revelation distinguishes angels from the redeemed multitude. <b>Human beings do not become angels when they die.</b>                                                                                                         | Revelation 7:9–12; Hebrews 12:22–23.           |
| <b>Seraphim</b>               | The six-winged heavenly attendants in Isaiah's vision. They proclaim God's holiness, and one serves in the symbolic cleansing of Isaiah before his commission. Their presence connects adoration, purification, and service.                                                        | Isaiah 6:1–8.                                  |
| <b>Cherubim</b>               | Heavenly beings associated with God's holy presence and throne. Ezekiel identifies the living beings he had seen beneath God's glory as cherubim. Their biblical portrayal is far more majestic than the small winged children often pictured in popular art.                       | Ezekiel 10:1–22, especially verse 20.          |
| <b>Four living creatures</b>  | The throne attendants described in Revelation, with features resembling a lion, calf, human face, and eagle. They continually proclaim God's holiness. Their imagery resembles Ezekiel's and Isaiah's visions, but the descriptions should not be flattened into identical details. | Revelation 4:6–9; Isaiah 6:2–3; Ezekiel 10:14. |
| <b>Twenty-four elders</b>     | Crowned figures seated around God's throne who bow in worship and relinquish their crowns before him. The passage does not name them individually; their exact identity should not be presented as settled beyond what Scripture states.                                            | Revelation 4:4, 10–11.                         |
| <b>White-robed multitude</b>  | The redeemed gathered before God and the Lamb. Revelation connects their white robes with cleansing through the Lamb's blood. Their presence celebrates Christ's redemption, not their independent achievement.                                                                     | Revelation 7:9–17.                             |

The *Te Deum* names angels, cherubim, seraphim, apostles, prophets, martyrs, and the worldwide Church. Its purpose is to help the earthly congregation recognize the breadth of the company praising God.

## Expressions and actions of heavenly worship

| Term                                          | Meaning and heavenly significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Key Scriptures               |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Adoration / worship — <i>proskyneō</i></b> | A Greek verb meaning to <b>bow down, do homage, or worship</b> , according to context. In Revelation, the action expresses reverence toward God and the Lamb. Worship involves acknowledging another's greatness rather than displaying our own. | Revelation 4:10; 5:14; 7:11. |
| <b>Sacred service — <i>latreuō</i></b>        | A Greek verb meaning <b>to serve</b> , especially in service directed toward God. The redeemed serve God in his presence. Heavenly worship therefore includes faithful service, not singing alone.                                               | Revelation 7:15; 22:3.       |

| Term                                     | Meaning and heavenly significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Key Scriptures                              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Doxology</b>                          | A declaration of praise that ascribes glory to God. The word is related to Greek <i>doxa</i> , meaning glory. Heaven’s declarations identify God’s wisdom, power, honor, and worthiness; they are filled with truth about him.                               | Revelation 4:9–11; 7:12.                    |
| <b>Thanksgiving — <i>eucharistia</i></b> | Grateful acknowledgment of God and his works. This Greek noun occurs in Revelation’s description of heavenly worship. Its presence means thanksgiving; it does not, by itself, establish that bread and wine are being distributed in that particular scene. | Revelation 4:9; 7:12.                       |
| <b>Sanctus</b>                           | Latin for <b>holy</b> , used as the name of the Church’s acclamation beginning with the threefold declaration of God’s holiness. It draws on Isaiah’s vision and resonates with Revelation’s throne worship. It also appears within the <i>Te Deum</i> .     | Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8.                 |
| <b>New song</b>                          | A song celebrating God’s saving work. Revelation associates it with redemption and worship before the throne. “New” does not necessarily mean improvised, previously unrehearsed, or sung without understandable words.                                      | Revelation 5:9–10; 14:3.                    |
| <b>Song of Moses and the Lamb</b>        | The heavenly victory song that joins the memory of God’s deliverance associated with Moses to the triumph of the Lamb. It celebrates God’s works, righteousness, holiness, and the nations’ worship.                                                         | Revelation 15:2–4; compare Exodus 15.       |
| <b>Prostration</b>                       | Falling down, sometimes explicitly on one’s face, before God. It expresses profound humility and reverence. It is a bodily response to divine glory, not a technique for forcing a spiritual experience.                                                     | Revelation 7:11; 11:16.                     |
| <b>Casting crowns</b>                    | The elders place their crowns before God’s throne. As an application, the action invites us to surrender recognition, status, and achievement to the One worthy of all honor.                                                                                | Revelation 4:10–11.                         |
| <b>Incense / golden bowls / censer</b>   | Worship imagery connecting the saints’ prayers with God’s presence. A <b>censer</b> is a vessel for burning incense. These are objects associated with prayer and worship, <b>not musical instruments</b> .                                                  | Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4; compare Psalm 141:2. |
| <b>Intercession / petition</b>           | Prayer that brings needs before God. Heavenly scenes include the saints’ prayers and the martyrs’ appeal for justice. Worship does not exclude concern for suffering or the fulfillment of God’s promises.                                                   | Revelation 6:9–11; 8:3–4.                   |

### Hebrew terms for Psalmic worship

**Psalmic worship** means worship shaped by the Psalms—their praise, thanksgiving, prayers, songs, and responses to God.

| Hebrew term         | Meaning in worship                                                                                                                 | Scripture and heavenly connection                                                                                                          |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Halal — הלל</b>  | <b>To praise, commend, or celebrate.</b> In worship, it expresses acknowledgment of God’s greatness.                               | Psalm 150 repeatedly calls for praise. Its connection with <i>Hallelujah</i> carries into Revelation 19.                                   |
| <b>Yadah — ידה</b>  | <b>To give thanks, praise, or confess</b> , depending on context. In thanksgiving passages, it means acknowledging God gratefully. | Psalm 107:1; 1 Chronicles 16:4. It parallels heaven’s thanksgiving, but should not automatically be defined as one required hand position. |
| <b>Todah — תודה</b> | <b>Thanksgiving</b> , a thanksgiving offering, or an expression of grateful praise, according to context.                          | Psalm 100:4; 50:14. It is not a technical term meaning only “praise offered before a miracle happens.”                                     |

| Hebrew term                 | Meaning in worship                                                                                                                                                                                      | Scripture and heavenly connection                                                                                |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Zamar</b> — זָמַר        | <b>To make music or sing praise</b> , often with instrumental accompaniment.                                                                                                                            | Psalms 33:2; 47:6–7. It provides an earthly parallel to the musical praise depicted in Revelation.               |
| <b>Tehillah</b> — תְּהִלָּה | <b>Praise or a song of praise</b> . It can describe the praise offered or the praise for which God is worthy.                                                                                           | Psalms 145:1, 21. The word does not inherently mean spontaneous singing or singing in tongues.                   |
| <b>Barak</b> — בָּרַךְ      | <b>To bless</b> . When people bless God, they acknowledge and praise his goodness and greatness. The word also has uses connected with kneeling, but does not require that posture in every occurrence. | Psalms 103:1–2; 95:6. Compare the blessing offered to God in heavenly worship.                                   |
| <b>Shabach</b> — שָׁבַח     | <b>To praise, commend, or extol</b> . The emphasis is on declaring someone's excellence. It need not mean shouting in every passage.                                                                    | Psalms 63:3; 117:1. It corresponds conceptually to heaven's declarations of God's greatness.                     |
| <b>Shachah</b> — שָׁחָה     | <b>To bow down or prostrate oneself</b> , including in worship.                                                                                                                                         | Psalms 95:6. This is a particularly clear earthly parallel to the bowing and prostration depicted in Revelation. |

| Instrument or term                        | Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                      | Where it appears and what we can say                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Harp / lyre</b> — Greek <i>kithara</i> | A plucked string instrument. The Greek term is commonly translated <b>harp</b> , although it belongs to the ancient lyre tradition; we should not assume the shape of a modern concert harp. | Explicitly present in Revelation 5:8; 14:2; 15:2. This is the clearest instrumental connection with heavenly song.                                                                                       |
| <b>Heavenly trumpets</b>                  | Instruments sounded by angels to announce events in God's unfolding purposes.                                                                                                                | Revelation 8:2, 6; 11:15. These passages depict proclamation and judgment, not simply accompaniment for congregational singing.                                                                          |
| <b>Kinnor</b> — כִּנּוֹר                  | An ancient string instrument, generally understood as a lyre and often translated <b>harp</b> .                                                                                              | Psalms 150:3; 1 Chronicles 15:16. An earthly counterpart to Revelation's string-instrument imagery, though the Hebrew and Greek terms should not be treated as precise modern instrument specifications. |
| <b>Nebel</b> — נֶבֶל                      | Another ancient string instrument, variously rendered <b>harp</b> , <b>psaltery</b> , or <b>stringed instrument</b> . Its exact construction should not be asserted too confidently.         | Psalms 150:3; 1 Chronicles 15:16. Explicit in earthly worship; Revelation does not separately name a <i>nebel</i> .                                                                                      |
| <b>Shofar</b> — שׁוֹפָר                   | A horn used for sounding calls and acclamations. It is distinct from Israel's manufactured silver trumpets.                                                                                  | Psalms 150:3; 1 Chronicles 15:28. Revelation's trumpets should not automatically be identified as ram's-horn shofars.                                                                                    |
| <b>Silver trumpets</b> — <i>ḥašōšet</i>   | Metal trumpets used by priests for assembly, signals, and occasions associated with offerings and celebration.                                                                               | Numbers 10:1–10; 1 Chronicles 15:24. These provide important earthly background, but Revelation does not specify the material or shape of its heavenly trumpets.                                         |
| <b>Timbrel / hand drum</b> — <i>tof</i>   | A hand-held percussion instrument, often translated <b>timbrel</b> or <b>tambourine</b> .                                                                                                    | Psalms 150:4. Explicitly named in earthly praise, but not explicitly assigned to heaven's worshipers in Revelation.                                                                                      |

| Instrument or term                | Meaning                                                                | Where it appears and what we can say                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cymbals</b>                    | Percussion instruments struck to produce a ringing or crashing sound.  | Psalms 150:5; 1 Chronicles 15:16, 19. Prominent in Davidic worship, but not explicitly named as heavenly worship instruments in Revelation. |
| <b>Flute / pipe — <i>ugab</i></b> | A wind instrument, translated <b>flute</b> in the NKJV of Psalm 150:4. | Psalms 150:4. It belongs to the Psalter's earthly summons to praise; it is not explicitly identified in Revelation's throne-room worship.   |

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