

Worship Notes

THEME:

Song in Scripture (Part 1)

King David's Lasting Musical Legacy

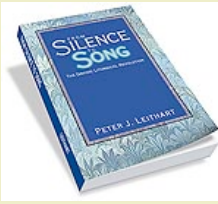
It is a remarkable fact that, after the establishment by God of the tabernacle and its accompanying worship system through Moses, as recorded in Exodus and Leviticus, there is virtually no mention of music being used in the public worship of Israel for many centuries. The one exception is Numbers 10:10, where the instruction is given for trumpets to be blown “over” the sacrifices “on the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months.” But as far as songs of praise go, about all we get are the songs of Moses and Miriam after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and the victory song of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5. The worship of the tabernacle seems to have been practiced without musical praise.

That situation changes drastically and dramatically with King David. When he establishes Jerusalem as the political and religious capital of Israel, the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant



DAVID'S
SIGNIFICANCE
in the
history of
worship:

1. He greatly developed and organized the use of music in public worship, both vocal and instrumental (see lead article).
2. He was the example par excellence of a true worshiper (cf. Psalm 63).
3. He wrote many songs for use in worship (including 73 of the Psalms).



**FROM
SILENCE TO
SONG:
The Davidic
Liturgical
Revolution**

Peter J. Leithart
(Canon Press, 2003)

“After the establishment of a permanent, fixed ‘place’ for the Lord’s throne and His house, the earlier Levitical duty of physically ‘transporting’ and ‘servicing’ the tabernacle and its furnishings was transformed into a musical ‘bearing’ of God’s name and throne.

David applied and expanded the Levitical law, and in so doing radically revised the job description of the Levites, but he did this without canceling the Mosaic laws of worship. If the Levites were responsible for the physical ‘exaltation’ of Yahweh’s throne, they were also legitimately responsible for the verbal and musical exaltation of His name.”

and dramatically with King David. When he establishes Jerusalem as the political and religious capital of Israel, the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant go from being portable, mobile worship sites to being stationary, established worship venues. Interestingly, David leaves the Mosaic tabernacle itself in Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39-43), and puts the Ark in a newly constructed tabernacle in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:1); the sacrifices continue (only) in Gibeon, and there is some musical worship there too (1 Chronicles 16:40-42), but Jerusalem becomes the doxological center of the nation, where daily praises as well as the nation’s festivals are celebrated.

And David enriches those celebrations with a huge overhaul of the practice of public worship, most notably by assigning and organizing whole ranks of Levites to be full-time musical ministers, as singers and as instrumentalists, in the service of the people’s worship. See especially chapters 15, 16, 23 and 25 of 1 Chronicles for descriptions of these developments. (It has also been pointed out that the stability and peace brought about by David’s military victories and settling of Jerusalem allowed for the training of musicians in a way that would have been more difficult before).

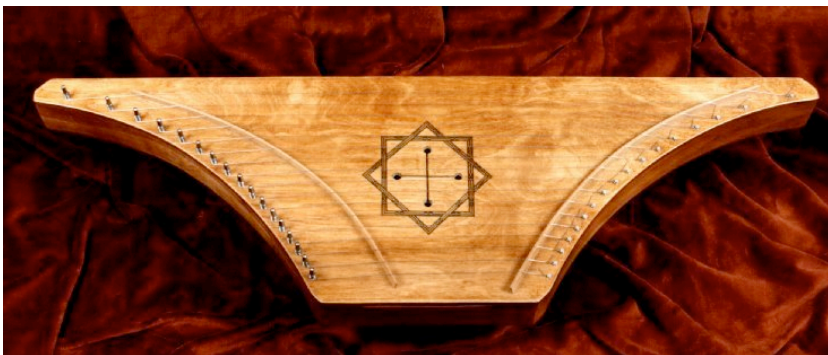
Peter Leithart has written a fascinating little book entitled *From Silence to Song*, with the appropriate subtitle *The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*. For indeed David, himself a musician, instituted a revolutionary overhaul of the way worship was done by the Jewish people. In his book Leithart lays out the grandeur of Davids’ worship reforms, and their huge implications not only for Israel, but also for the Church on into our present day. For, as Leithart points out, “when Christians sing

hymns and psalms in worship, when we play organs or pianos, guitars or trumpets, we are heirs of David's 'liturgical revolution' " (p. 15). David made public musical praise a centerpiece of the corporate worship of God's people in a way that still continues in our churches today.

What gave David the right to tinker with and expand the Mosaic directives for Israel's worship? Leithart shows from 1 Chronicles 28:13,19 and 2 Chronicles 29:25 that David apparently received some sort of revelation from the Lord to that effect, so that his expansive recasting of the Mosaic system was divinely inspired and sanctioned.

Leithart also makes a good linguistic and conceptual case for the Levites' change of role under David's reforms: whereas one of the chief responsibilities assigned by Moses to them was to "lift up" the Ark and carry it (Numbers 4:15; Deuteronomy 10:8)—a job no longer necessary because the Ark was now a stationary fixture—their role now morphs into one of "lifting up" the Lord in song and praise. The "service" of the tabernacle that they were to carry out (Deuteronomy 10:8; there is no mention at all of music in Deuteronomy) now carries a large musical component (1 Chronicles 16:4-43).

David, the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1), thus had (beyond his own musical production, many texts of which we have preserved in the book of Psalms) a far-reaching and profound influence on the song of God's covenant people and its place in public worship.



Quotables

SINGING THE LORD'S SONG

In song, Christians are able “to speak and pray the same word at the same time. . . ; here, they can unite in the Word.”

(Stephen R. Guthrie, “Singing, in the Body and in the Spirit,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46/4 [December 2003], 643)

“Songwriters need theologians to offer inspiration and guidance in their work as lyricists. Making use of capable Christian poets would also help lift our lyrics above the mundane. In the same way theologians, along with all Christians, need songwriters to weave the words and notes of praise into a tapestry of song that they can take upon their own lips.”

(Robin Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, 189)

“There is a trend towards singing songs addressed to a Jesus who has been stripped of any references to the narrative that makes him who he is. Such songs speak

of a ‘Lord’ called ‘Jesus’ who makes the singers feel loved and accepted, but often there is no reference to his incarnation, his teaching, his miracles, his life, his death-resurrection-ascension or his coming return. It is not that there is anything necessarily wrong with a song that does this. If in a meeting some of the other songs, Scripture readings, prayers and sermon fill in the details, then the congregation understands that the Jesus in this minimalist song is the same Jesus painted elsewhere in such rich colours. The problem is that if such songs become dominant, we gradually lose sight of the biblical Christ and replace him with ‘Jesus-my-personal-therapist’ or ‘Jesus-my-mystic-girlfriend’. Jesus-the-personal-therapist and Jesus-the-mystic-girlfriend are vague characters who give worshippers warm fuzzy feelings of acceptance, but I think one has to seriously ask whether such Christs are the real Christ at all.” (Robin Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 110-111)

“Worship songs should serve the church as take-home theology, reinforcing God-glorifying doctrine and teaching through Christ-centered lyrics and memorable melodies.”

C. J. Mahaney)

“He is the Founder of our Song, so
it’s to Him we come!

His Son is the Foundation of our
Song, so it’s Him we
praise!

His Spirit is the Fountain of our
Song, so we drink of Him!”
(author unknown)

“Music, of course, does not re-make us; the Holy Spirit does. But it seems possible that music may be one means by which the Holy Spirit makes us people who feel and respond. We are brought to our senses. We are drawn out of the darkness of self-absorption and become aware of the world around us, our place within and responsibility to it. In song we move in a dance of sympathy

with the others who are singing, and by the body are drawn out of ourselves and into the Body.”

(Stephen R. Guthrie, “Singing, in the Body and in the Spirit,” 643)

For the central—and only indispensable—music of evangelical Christianity is congregational singing, the whole church demonstrating its priesthood in song. Singing in worship is not reserved for priests or for ‘singers’; singing is for believers. The crucial question is not ‘Do you have a voice?’ but ‘Do you have a song?’ ”
(Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate! Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*, 243)

“[Luther] gave the German people in their own language the Bible and the hymnbook, so God might speak to them *directly to the in His Word, and that they might* directly answer Him in their songs.”

(A. E. Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, 313)

NEXT MONTH: *Song in Scripture* (part 2)

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