

How Life Shaped Song with Israel, Hooton, Don (2020)

Intro: Music in the form of both instrumental and singing have existed in every human culture, including the most isolated tribal groups, and “it may be concluded that music is likely to have been present in the ancestral population prior to the dispersal of humans around the world” (Wallin, Nels Lennart, *The Origins of Music*). It has been a powerful part of our human and cultural identity. Even today, how many times have you been quietly driving in the car, and a tune starts singing in your head? It may take a little while, but eventually, the whole song bursts upon your mind’s eye and ear of your mind and captures your attention. As we connect this to us as Christians, we need to see that **song is more easily recalled than any sermon, lecture, or class** - no matter how powerful or profound the speaker is. When your heart faints, lyrics come to your mind. When your heart breaks, the rhythm of song soothingly cradles your spirit. This applies to us in life – but it applies to us in worship. And we want to consider how life shaped song – especially worshipful song – in Israel. And how it should impact us.

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The first book of the Bible is Genesis. It opens with the creation of the world by God, followed by the creation of the world's first humans: Adam and Eve. For a time, Adam and Eve live in peace in the Garden of Eden. However, they eventually rebel against God's command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When they do, they sin, lose their innocence and become capable of cruelty, deception, and murder. Then, Moses traced the lineages from the first couple. In those lineages is the note in Genesis 4:21 about the son of Lamech, **Jabel, who “was the father of all those play the lyre and pipe.”** While there is no mention of *song* in that reference, this is a reference to music. Then later, when Laban catches up with Jacob, he said, “Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me, so **that I might send you away with joy and with songs**, with timbrel and with lyre” (31:27).

In the first reference, there was a tribal identity for Jubal as being **originators of the trades of music playing** – as well as the tribal identity for those of Tubal-Cain (another son) as the originators of forging the implements of bronze and iron. Music skills were passed on within those tribes – just as bronze and iron workers were. Its usefulness and practicality deserved this notification from Moses in history. In the second reference, Laban saw music in his home **as expressive of joy, merriment and celebration**. But in both references, neither are suggested as worship, per se, – or sinful – but rather, as the cultural life together among people. Whether it was a marriage feast (Jer 7:34) or a funeral (2Sam 1:17-27; Matt 9:23), the singing of music is an expression of intense joy or sorrow. The context here is not religious, but social. But what they do show is that music was emotive expressions and accompanied joyful events. However, it should be no surprise that music’s power of expression became a means by which humans praised God.

The first references where music is connected with religious worship in Scripture occurs during the ministry of Moses. What we find is that song and instrumental music was used.

First, we learn that **God accepted worship which contained only vocal music**. The following references are singing without any reference to instruments (Ex 15:1-18; Num 21:17; Deut 31:19-32:44; Judg 5:1-12; 2Sam 22:1; 22:50; 1Kings 4:32; 1Chron 6:31-33; 9:33; 2Chron 23:18; 35:15; 35:25; Ezra 2:41, 65, 70; 7:7, 24; 20:24; Neh 7:1, 44, 67, 73; 10:28, 39; 11:22-23; 13:5, 10; Job 35:10; Isa 5:1; 12:2, 5; 24:14, 16; 26:1; 35:10; 42:10-11; 44:23; 48:20; 49:13; 51:3, 11; 52:8-9; Jer 20:13; 31:7; 31:12; 33:11; Ezel 40:44; Amos 8:3, 10; Jonah 2:9; Zeph 3:14, 17; Zech 2:10). **Even as we have noted in the Psalms that many reference singing with no mention of instruments** (Psa 7:17; 9:2, 11; 13:6; 18:1, 49; 21:13; 27:6; 28:7; 30:1, 4, 12; 32:7; 34:1; 35:1; 40:3; 42:8; 51:14; 59:16; 61:8; 65:13; 66:2-4; 69:12, 30; 77:6; 89:1; 95:1,2; 96:1, 2; 100:2; 101:1; 104:12, 33; 105:2; 118:14; 119:54; 126:2; 135:3; 138:1, 5; 145:7; 146:2).

However, God accepted worship in Israel through instruments (Ex 15:20-21; 1Sam 10:5; 2Sam 6:5, 15, 21; 1Kings 10:12; 2Kings 12:13; 1Chr 13:8; 15:16-29; 16:5-9, 23, 42; 23:5; 25:1-7; 2Chr 5:12-13; 7:6; 9:11;

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15:14; 20:19-28; **29:25-30**; 30:21; 34:12; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:8-47; Isa 5:12; 30:29; 38:20; Amos 5:23; 6:5; Hab 3:19).

In the New Testament, in contrast, there is only references for worship among Christians as singing (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom 15:9; 1Cor 14:15; 1Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Heb 2:12; Jam 5:13). And today, we sing because that is what God has, through the testimony of the Spirit in the inspired Apostles, *given as the pattern of worship for us today*.

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While the point of this class is not to show that instrumental music today is unacceptable in worship to God (which it is since God is silent on it, Col 3:17; 2John 9), we should note that even when worship was offered in the Old Testament, *it was an accompaniment to the voice* – the singing – the making of melody in the heart. In the New Testament we have come to a time where in Christ Jesus, we have realized the fulness of time and the fulness of the purpose of musical worship – the adoration of God in words from our heart.

Closest to the time of the apostles, history shows that in these writing from the Ante-Nicene fathers (2nd and 3rd centuries):

- "The one instrument of peace, the word alone by which we honor God is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, the cymbal, the flute..." (Clement of Alexandria, 2nd century)
- "The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly, in all the churches of God, we send up a unison melody" (Eusebius of Caesarea, who is generally regarded as the first church historian with Comments on Psalm 91, 3rd century)
- "the Christians arose with the sun, and sang to Christ as to a god..." (Pliny's letter to Roman Emperor, Trajan, quoted in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, III, p.33 - c. AD 111)

Hundreds of years later, we find that the Catholic church as a whole, still rejected instrumental music. Even up to 1250 AD, from the writings of Thomas Aquinas, we glean this explanation:

- "Our church does not use musical instruments as harps and psalteries to praise God withal that she may not seem to Judaize." (Summa Theologica)
- "Although Josephus tells of the wonderful effects produced in the Temple by the use of instruments, the first Christians were of too spiritual fibre to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice. Clement of Alexandria severely condemns the use of instruments even at Christian banquets (P.G., VIII, 4440). St. Chrysostom sharply contrasts the customs of the Christians at the time when they had full freedom with those of the Jews of the Old Testament (ibid., LV, 494-7). Similarly write a series of early ecclesiastical writers down to St. Thomas (Summa, II-II, Q.xci,a.2)" ("Music," The Catholic Encyclopedia, X:651)

In 1888, John L. Girardeau, a professor at the Presbyterian Columbia Theological Seminary, wrote Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church to explain to his students why the Presbyterian church had previously rejected instrumental music. Among many notable quotes, he writes:

- "It is heresy in the sphere of worship" (Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church, p.179).
- "Psallo never occurs in the New Testament, in its radical signification, to strike or play upon an instrument." (Music in the Church, pp.116-118).

But back to our lesson on hand, life shaped the expression of intense joy or sorrow in these songs. And we will study different songs in the following weeks that are recorded in Scripture but not in the Psalter, the Jewish Songbook.

- The Song of David | 2Samuel 22 (with Psalm 18)

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- The Song of Moses | Exodus 15:1-21
- The Second Song of Moses
- The Song of Jonah | Jonah 2:3-10
- The Song of Deborah | Judges 5,
- The Prayer/Song of Hannah | 1Samuel 2:1-20,
- The Song of Hezekiah | Isaiah 38:9-20,
- The Prayer/Song of Habakkuk | Habakkuk 3,
- The Prayer/Song of Daniel | Daniel 2:20-23,
- The Song of Asaph | 1Chronicles 16:8-36;

Each of these songs break out to show us the emotion of joy and sorrow that these worshippers felt. The life they lived shaped the praise they offered.

The applications I want us to see (again):

1. Life affects us.

- a. When we come to worship, the songs we sing should reflect the heart of the worshippers.
- b. Song Leaders should be mindful of that – not with merely regularly picking songs unknown to the worshippers or songs only loved as favorites by the leaders, but worship that stirs the hearts who know what life is for them.

2. Heart worship is God's only approved worship.

- a. "Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways." (Prov 23:26).
- b. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:29).
- c. The worship of God in song is not to have a "different" emotion or "different" disposition of heart. The One addressed or the one praised is HOLY. God deserves our "different" attitude but to say that expressions of joy or of sadness is "different" with worship song than other song is to disconnect the heart from the act of song. "Sing with the mind and sing with the spirit" (1Corinthians 14:15).
- d. Still, it's not a performance – it's a sharing to glorify God.

- 3. So when we see song in our worship,** let's not make it routine – merely functional – or a rote thing we have to do to make the assembly "worship." It is the expression of faith we have that our life has found.