

Lincoln Christian Seminary

WORSHIP LEADERSHIP IN THE BIBLE

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree

by

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December 2006

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Candidate's major: Worship Studies

Title of the thesis: Worship Leadership in the Bible

Date of oral exam/presentation: November 29, 2006

Date of graduation: December 31, 2006

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATION

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge those who, in one way or another, have made a significant contribution to the completion of this thesis.

First, I express my thanks to the leadership of Central Church of Christ (Streator, IL), supported my seminary education with encouragement, time away from the office, and not least of all, the necessary finances. I am sincerely grateful for my years of ministry there.

Second, I acknowledge those who helped shape the content of the thesis with their comments and insights:

- Students in my Introduction to Worship class at Saint Louis Christian College (Spring 2006), many of whom read initial drafts of chapters and offered helpful comments.
- Don Thiessen, author of *Selah! A Guide to Music in the Bible*, who offered helpful insights at a critical juncture;
- My mother, Mary McEntire, who proofread the project.

Above all, I express my love and gratitude to my beautiful wife Melanie—God’s greatest gift to me aside from salvation. She has endured nine consecutive years of my “seminary habit.” It is only because of her grace and patience that I have been able to complete this thesis. The author of Proverbs 31 must have been thinking of her when he wrote:

A wife of noble character who can find?  
She is worth far more than rubies.  
“Many women do noble things,  
but you surpass them all.” (Pr. 31.10, 29, NIV)

## ABSTRACT

There is much confusion in the contemporary church regarding the worship leader. Local churches, Christian colleges, the Christian music industry, and worship leaders themselves have often competed to establish a definitive understanding of biblical worship leadership. When combined with a general unawareness about the meaning of biblical worship, it becomes clear that Scriptural guidance is in order concerning the vital role of the worship leader.

The purpose of this thesis is to survey the Bible in search of the timeless, transferable principles of worship leadership. We will demonstrate that the defining marks of a worship leader are *godly character* and *humble competence*, as revealed through the various men and women who led worship in the Bible. *Godly character* (who a person is) describes the extent to which a person has submitted himself or herself to the character of Christ, while *humble competence* (what a person does) points to skills or abilities that are given by God and developed for the purpose of glorifying God and building up the church.

The chapters correspond roughly to a chronological overview of worship leadership in the Bible. Chapters 1-3 we examine the worship leadership of key Old Testament figures: Moses and David (Chapter 1), Tribal Leaders, Priests & Kings (Chapter 2), and Levites (Chapter 3). In Chapters 4 and 5 we move to the New Testament and examine the worship leadership of Jesus (Chapter 4) and Paul (Chapter 5). Each chapter contains pertinent information about the worship leadership of the subjects presented and concludes with brief thoughts related to the character and competence of a worship leader. In Chapter 6 we will summarize the findings presented in earlier chapters and consider application for worship leaders today.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1991 box-office hit *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal portrays a middle-aged man named Mitch in search of meaning and direction in life. He sets off out west with a group of friends to take part in a cattle drive and discover a sense of purpose. Jack Palance plays a crusty, weather-beaten cowboy named Curly who teaches them about driving cattle and a few other lessons of life. While riding along the trail, Curly turns to Mitch and asks, “You know what the secret to life is?”

“No, what?” Mitch responds.

Curly raises one finger and replies, “One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don’t mean nothing.”

“That’s great, but what’s the one thing?” says Mitch.

Curly’s reply is the nugget at the center of the movie: “That’s what you’ve got to figure out.”<sup>1</sup>

Worship leaders and the churches they serve would do well to take this advice. Much like Mitch, a man who has lost his focus and direction, worship leaders and other influential forces shaping the church have failed to adequately understand the role of the worship leader. These forces often compete in a battle to define what worship leadership in the church is all about.

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Underwood, dir., *City Slickers* (Century City, CA: MGM/UA, 1991).

Local churches are confused. Leaders have allowed the role of worship leader to be defined by programmatic and pragmatic concerns rather than a biblical understand of worship and its role in the local church. A St. Louis area church recently posted a job description<sup>2</sup> for a full-time Worship Minister, whose responsibilities were summarized in no less than sixteen separate areas.<sup>3</sup> The tidal wave of change in worship style over the last generation has left many churches mystified about what kind of person they should hire to lead a dynamic worship program.

Christian colleges are confused. The curriculum for worship and music programs seems to be in a constant state of flux. Professors and administrators can find it difficult and frustrating to keep pace with rapidly changing trends in this critical area.<sup>4</sup>

The Christian music industry is confused. Because of the immense popularity of worship-oriented music in the last decade, the line between performance artist and worship leader has become blurred.<sup>5</sup> On many fronts, the worship music industry has morphed into a commercial enterprise that relates to the church as a provider of consumer goods, rather than an

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<sup>2</sup> The terminology here betrays the church's philosophy that the Worship Minister (or worship leader) should be primarily concerned with the tasks of ministry. A former professor of mine, Ron Oakes (who taught education and youth ministry at Saint Louis Christian College, and is now the President of Central Christian College), drew a clear distinction between a "job description" and a "ministry description." The former focuses on the "job" needing to be done, while the latter points to the larger ministry role, which encompasses much more than a list of tasks. The difference is subtle but significant.

<sup>3</sup> The church will remain anonymous for sake of privacy. I should give credit to the church, however, for including as the first item in the job description a paragraph speaking of the importance of character in the Worship Minister.

<sup>4</sup> This insight is based on anecdotal evidence gained from my involvement with the ACCME (Association of Christian College Music Educators), a peer organization comprised of professors teaching worship and music in Christian colleges and universities associated with the Restoration Movement. At Saint Louis Christian College, where I teach, we have made substantial modifications to the worship and music degree program in the last two years.

<sup>5</sup> A recent case in point would be the January 2006 issue of CCM (Contemporary Christian Music) magazine, which featured artists/worship leaders Chris Tomlin and David Crowder on the cover, and Jeremy Camp on a back-page advertisement.

artistic community seeking to further the mission of the church. Speaking of the “worship revival” of the last decade, Christian artist and music veteran Charlie Peacock notes,

“This revival/popularity is getting lots of help from marketing forces within the Christian music industry. Worship music now accounts for 30 percent of the market. Anytime numbers this dramatic appear, the question of the chicken or the egg gets revived. Which came first, authentic worship that industry has followed or authentic industry that worship has followed?”<sup>6</sup>

Worship leaders themselves are confused. Anyone serving as a worship leader (whether paid staff or volunteer) must wear many hats: theologian, singer, artist, leader, administrator, recruiter, planner, technical wizard and pastor! The number of resources for worship leaders continues to grow at a fast pace; music, conferences, books, training resources and other materials intended to equip worship leaders can inadvertently be very intimidating. How can anyone embody all of these necessary skills? To further frustrate matters, many worship leaders are not adequately trained. Some were trained at a secular school but lack the necessary theological training. Others have pastoral experience and education but lack formal music training. It seems as if no one is qualified to meet the demands of contemporary worship ministry!

Finally, and most important, there is confusion about worship itself. Even the ubiquitous terms “worship service” and “worship leader” are misnomers, for the worship of God cannot be confined to a particular service, and more than one individual should be designated to help lead the church in worship of various kinds. Many worship leaders (perhaps a more appropriate term is the old-fashioned but more accurate “song leader”) have used the phrase “Let’s stand and worship” to begin a service, but it is difficult to imagine that anyone would equate music with

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<sup>6</sup> Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads: Inside the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music*. Revised and expanded ed. (Colorado Springs: Shaw, 2004), 153.

worship. Yet the terminology indicates that worship actually *does* equal music. Is it any wonder that Christians are often puzzled about the meaning of worship?

Given all of these dynamics and the confusion that often surrounds the role of the worship leader, we are naturally led to ask several questions: What qualities or characteristics should a worship leader possess? Does God’s Word shed any light on our modern confusion about worship leaders? If so, can it give us clarity about the purpose, role or qualifications for worship leaders?

I believe it can. Although worship leadership in the Bible is multi-faceted and occurred in a variety of settings, the unchanging principles can be applied to worship leaders today. The purpose of this project is to survey the Bible in search of the timeless, transferable principles of worship leadership. As a result, we will demonstrate that the defining marks of a worship leader are *godly character* and *humble competence*, as revealed through the various men and women who led worship in the Bible. Before defining some of the terms contained in this statement, it is appropriate to describe the limits of this study.

The scope is limited to a brief survey of a number of models and images we find in Scripture. This is neither a historical analysis nor a systematic investigation into the theology of worship, although one cannot escape history and theology when dealing with the biblical story. Rather, this project gives attention to the “portable principles” of worship leadership—the lessons or application that can be transferred from the biblical to the contemporary world with relative ease and understanding. Although this thesis is an academic project, it is also hoped that those in pastoral ministry will benefit from it as well. My hope is to echo the sentiment of Robert Webber in his preface to volume 1 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*: “The purpose is pastoral, and grows out of the urgent desire to serve those who lead worship in the

local church. . . . Consequently, the *Library* is an attempt to unite academic studies in worship with the day-to-day and week-to-week practice of worship in the local church.”<sup>7</sup>

It will be helpful in this introduction to define several terms used throughout this project:

*Worship.* Before giving attention to defining “worship leader” we must first define the core concept of “worship.” The term is so ubiquitous in the Christian community that it at once says everything and nothing. Therefore, we must attempt to define what is meant when the term is used.

Worship is first and foremost a *response*. Eugene Peterson observes:

In worship God gathers his people to himself as center: ‘The Lord reigns’ (Ps. 93.1). Worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God. . . . If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose.<sup>8</sup>

Worship matters immensely to God, so much so that as A. W. Tozer notes, “We are saved to worship God. All that Christ has done for us in the past and all that He is doing now leads to this one end...”<sup>9</sup> Worship in the broad sense involves all of life: it is our “spiritual worship” (Rom. 12.1). But Christians also participate in the weekly practice of corporate worship. Each of these informs the other. We worship throughout the week so that we may be prepared for Sunday (or other times of corporate worship). Sunday, in turn, prepares and sustains us for the week ahead.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), xxxvii.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 60. Richard Foster also notes, “Worship is the human response to the divine initiative. . . . Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father. See Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 158.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment: Selected Excerpts*. Compiled by James L. Snyder. Camp Hill, PN: Christian Publications, 1997.

However, meaningful corporate worship does not happen by accident; must be *led*. It has always required a committed leader who accepts the joy and responsibility of leading saved people in the worship of their Savior. If the chief question related to worship is “What does God expect from worship?” then the corollary question (and the focus of this thesis) is “What does God expect from the worship *leader*?”

*Worship leader*. This term refers to a person or group of people who lead in various elements of Christian corporate worship. It primarily refers to those who lead singing and music, although worship is certainly not limited to these elements. “Worship leader” seems to be a fairly new term that came into use as a result of the praise and worship movement, but we certainly find those in the Bible whose lives and ministries are models for worship leadership today.<sup>10</sup>

From a biblical perspective, the “worship leader” is distinct from other leadership and ministry roles such as prophet, priest, king or apostle, although in some instances one’s worship leadership may flow out of those roles (i.e. David or Paul). When using “worship leader” in a contemporary sense we are implying church staff or volunteers whose primary role is to oversee, plan and lead the musical and artistic elements of corporate worship. In addition, this role can include broader leadership and pastoral activities such as mentoring and teaching.

It is important to note that except in cases where it seems necessary, we are not including all musicians under the general category of “worship leaders.” Although the role of worship leader often implies musical or artistic skills, not all musicians are worship leaders. For instance, we could cite the first mention of a musician in the Bible (Jubal, Gen. 4.21), but there is no indication that he led worship. The term “worship leader” implies leadership, which is developed over time whether or not a person is perceived to be a “born leader.”

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<sup>10</sup> The author could find no statistics regarding when the term came into popular use.

*Defining marks.* This refers to the timeless skills, knowledge, attitudes, characteristics or other attributes that distinguish a worship leader. These qualities are essential for worship leadership but not necessarily unique to the worship leader. However, they are qualities that define or set apart a worship leader.

*Godly character.* “Character” can be defined as “moral excellence or firmness,”<sup>11</sup> but godly character extends beyond mere morality. If character refers to the totality of *who a person is*, godly character describes the extent to which a person has submitted himself or herself to the character of Christ (Phil. 2.6-11). Godly character exists not for its own sake, but for the sake of God’s glory. It is “being the right person” in relationship to God, and bringing the totality of one’s life under submission to Christ as Lord. The concept of godly character and integrity is found throughout Scripture (for example, Pss. 1, 15, 24 and the qualifications for elders and deacons, found in 1 Tim. 3.1-13 and Tit. 1.6-9). In the realm of spiritual leadership, skill is not enough; it must be accompanied by godly character.

*Humble competence.* Competence refers to gifts, skills or abilities possessed by an individual. The New Testament speaks clearly of spiritual gifts given to Christians (Rom. 12.3-8, 1 Cor. 12.1-31, Eph. 4.11-15). These gifts include teaching, leadership, healing, administration, evangelism and many others. These supernatural gifts are given by God to each person for the purpose of building up the church. But in order to fully operate within their realm of effectiveness in the body of Christ, worship leaders must hone and develop those gifts so that he or she may lead with excellence. Competence refers to skills or abilities that are natural or developed over time, as well as the gifts given by God for the good of the church.

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<sup>11</sup> Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993). Accessed via Logos Software.

If godly character refers to *who a person is*, competence refers to *what a person does*. A worship leader must be the right person in relation to Christ and do the right things required to achieve excellence in his or her craft and leadership. We refer to “humble competence” because our excellence and skill does not exist for its own glory. Instead, we seek to be competent in our skills so that God may be glorified and his people may be edified. With advanced skill must come appropriate humility.

Although other frameworks may be appropriate to distinguish the defining marks of a worship leader, we will employ the two primary categories of *godly character* and *humble competence* because they seem to best fit the scriptural data.<sup>12</sup>

The structure of the chapters corresponds roughly to a chronological overview of worship leadership in the Bible. In Chapters 1-3 we shall see the examples of worship leadership through key Old Testament figures and models: Moses and David (Chapter 1), Tribal Leaders, Priests & Kings (Chapter 2), and Levites (Chapter 3). In Chapters 4 and 5 we move to the New Testament and examine the worship leadership of Jesus (Chapter 4) and Paul (Chapter 5). Each chapter contains pertinent information about the worship leadership of the subjects presented and concludes with brief thoughts related to the character and competence of a worship leader. In Chapter 6 we will summarize the defining marks presented in the earlier chapters and consider application for worship leaders today.

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<sup>12</sup> Another possible framework could be the educational taxonomy categories of cognitive/affective/psychomotor. The *cognitive* refers to the mind, knowledge, or thinking. The *affective* describes the emotions, feelings, heart or attitudes. The *psychomotor* designates action, doing, skills or activity. These broad categories can also be stated as head/heart/hands or thinking/feeling/doing. Together, these three domains make up a person’s total identity. Even Scripture indicates that a person’s identity can be divided into several components. When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment he replied, “And you shall 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 12:30, cf. Deut. 6:5). For further information, see Norman E. Gronlund, *How to Write and Use Instruction Objectives*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1991), 29-31; William T. Pyle and Mary Alice Seals, eds., *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 61-62; Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1987), 69-83; Bob Rognlien, *Experiential Worship: Encountering God With Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005).

## CHAPTER 1

### MODELING WORSHIP: MOSES & DAVID

From the foundations of time God’s people have relied on leadership. John Maxwell has defined leadership simply as “influence.”<sup>1</sup> If this is true, the two greatest leaders in ancient Israel were Moses and David, whose combined influence extends from Genesis to Malachi and beyond.<sup>2</sup> They were more than political leaders; they were spiritual guides whom God held responsible for the worship life of his people. Moses and David were worship leaders in every sense of the term. They were worshipers themselves and were at times engaged in the musical life of Israel, but more importantly, they were *models* and *influencers* of worship. Because of their significance to the story of Israel, this chapter will examine the character and competence that defined their influence in worship. (We will also briefly examine Moses’ siblings Miriam and Aaron because of their close connection to his story.)

#### **Moses**

Although the book of Genesis contains the first mention of a musician (Jubal, “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe,” Gen. 4.21), there is no formal, organized worship among the people of Israel until after the Exodus.<sup>3</sup> Moses, the “colossus of the Old Testament”<sup>4</sup> who is considered a leader and a prophet, was also the first great worship leader to emerge in Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars generally agree that Moses was the author, or at least the editor, of the Pentateuch. As such, his influence would certainly extend to Genesis.

<sup>3</sup> There are, however, many “worship firsts” in Genesis. In addition to the first mention of a musician, Genesis includes: the first instance of false worship (Eve in 3.1ff), the first acceptable and unacceptable worship (Cain and

Moses received his call from God at Mt. Horeb while tending his father-in-law Jethro's flock. God appeared to him in a burning bush and gave him his divine assignment: lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Ex. 3.10). Moses was initially reluctant to fulfill his task, and gave God several reasons why he was not the one to complete the mission.<sup>5</sup> However, his reluctance gave way to acceptance of God's call, and his life was forever changed. Reggie McNeal notes, "Whatever Moses had made of his life was now going to come under reevaluation. Broken dreams, disillusionment, fear, insignificance were all going to be gathered up, not for discarding, but for reshaping in the fire of the call."<sup>6</sup>

#### Moses, Miriam & Aaron at the Red Sea

Moses' life was indeed reshaped as he obeyed God's call to leadership. A significant point in this leadership occurred at the first occurrence of corporate worship in the Bible. After suffering in slavery for 400 years, the Israelites had escaped the bondage of the Egyptians and witnessed their army being drowned in the Red Sea. They respond with an appropriate song of praise to God for His deliverance. Moses leads the people in singing:

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.  
The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him (Ex. 15.1-2).<sup>7</sup>

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Abel in 4.4ff), the first murder—over worship (Cain in 4.8), the first "calling on the name of the Lord (Abram in 12.7), the first tithe (Abram and Melchizedek in 14.17ff), and the first covenant (Abram in 15.17ff).

<sup>4</sup> Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Moses' reasons included: not knowing the name of the One who sent him (3.13), the Israelite's potential unbelief (4.1), and his own lack of eloquence (4.13). But God accounted for Moses' inadequacies and sent his older brother Aaron to help support his leadership and complete the task he was given (Ex. 4.14-17).

<sup>6</sup> McNeal, 12.

<sup>7</sup> The ESV (English Standard Version) of the Bible is used throughout this thesis.

In the subsequent verses (Ex. 15.3-18) Moses and the Israelites recount God's destruction of Pharaoh's army and extol the uniqueness of the God who delivered them. Then Miriam, a prophetess and the sister of Moses and Aaron, plays a tambourine, leads the women in playing tambourines and dancing, and sings a refrain of Moses' words in Ex. 15.1. This is the only mention in Scripture of Miriam as a prophetess; indeed, it is the only mention of Miriam by name in the entire book.<sup>8</sup> The text is unclear about her exact function as a prophetess, although the Old Testament names other women as prophetesses (Deborah in Judg. 4, and Huldah in 2 Kgs. 22). Music and prophesy were commonly associated in the Old Testament (see Appendix A: The Prophets: Prompting, Purifying & Restoring Worship for further information). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas note, "There is no reason to think that it was odd for a woman to be found in this role. . . . It was also common for musical troupes to feature women."<sup>9</sup>

Donald Thiessen argues that this may have been an antiphonal song in which the men sing as a choir with Moses and the women respond with Miriam.<sup>10</sup> Due to the content of the song it appears that it was a spontaneous composition. Whatever the arrangement, the song of praise is an energetic act of thanksgiving in response to God's faithfulness in delivering Israel from slavery.

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<sup>8</sup> The only other place Miriam is mentioned by name in the Old Testament is Num. 12.1, when Miriam and Aaron protest Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 91. Gail O'Day poses a provocative question: "Miriam's song celebrates a God who *will not ignore* affliction and oppression but who *will destroy* the powerful who exploit the powerless. Is it an accident that the earliest celebration of God's triumph in the Exodus comes in a woman's song?" Gail O'Day, "Singing Woman's Song: A Hermeneutic of Liberation," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 12, #4 (Aug. 1985), 204. For a detailed examination of women's musical involvement in ancient Israel, see Carol L. Meyers, "Of Drums and Damsels," *Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. 54, #1 (March 1991), 16-27. For a much broader overview of women and their involvement in Christian worship, see Susan J. White, *A History of Women in Christian Worship* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Donald Thiessen, *Selah: A Guide to Music in the Bible* (Chicago, Cornerstone Press: 2002), 3.

Ronald Allen calls this hymn “the first psalm of the Bible” because it is the first display of public worship for the newly liberated Israelites.<sup>11</sup> He argues that they developed their artistic gifts while in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the case, from this episode we see musical skill on display, as well as a humble recognition of God’s deliverance and provision. We also see the first appearance of musical prophecy.

### The Idolatry of Israel

Israel’s song of praise soon became a song of idolatry as they set out into the wilderness on their way to the promised land. When Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments and various instructions from the Lord, the Israelites became impatient and implored Aaron to “...make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Ex. 32.1). Aaron, in an act that blatantly contradicts his later role as high priest, took their earrings and fashioned the jewelry into a golden calf.<sup>13</sup> He also built an altar to the calf and led the people in making idolatrous offerings (Ex. 32.2-6). When Moses returned from the mountain with Joshua and witnessed the singing, idolatry and dancing, his anger burned against the people. As a result, he ground the golden calf to powder and made the people drink it with water (Ex. 32.17-20).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald B. Allen, “Worship in the Psalms: Exodus 15 and the Praise of God,” *Reformation & Revival*, vol. 9, #2 (Spring 2002), 105.

<sup>12</sup> Allen notes, “Music, poetry and art were already theirs because they had learned to do them in Egypt. It was Egyptian musical style and instrumentation that Moses and Miriam used on that day. It was their training in Egypt that gave to them the forms and patterns that they might use in their worship of God who had delivered them from Egypt.” *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Aaron’s intention here was not to form *another* God, but rather to give form to Yahweh. The golden calf was a representative of their God. However, this was in direct violation of the third commandment, which spoke against worshipping an image of God (Ex. 20.4). Walton, et al., 115.

<sup>14</sup> Moses’ intention here is not to punish the people by this action, but to utterly destroy the idol. It represents the “final, irreversible destruction of the calf.” Walton, et al., 116.

As a spiritual leader, Aaron demonstrated no responsibility in restraining the people. When questioned by Moses, he replied, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods who shall go before us’... So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf” (Ex. 32.22-24). As a result of his actions, the music and dancing directed to God after the Red Sea deliverance were being used to worship an idol. Here we have two contrasting pictures of a worship leader: Aaron misdirects the people’s worship and Moses redirects and restores their relationship with God by making atonement for their false worship (Ex. 32.30-34). This was not a matter of competence, but an issue of character and leadership.

#### Moses as a Composer

In addition to his role as spiritual leader, Moses was also a composer of hymns. He bookends his leadership with two hymns: the first is sung at the Red Sea celebration (Ex. 15.1ff) and the second is given just before his death. In Deut. 31.19-22, the Lord commands Moses to compose a song as a witness against Israel and their future unfaithfulness. That very day, Moses composed the song and taught it to them. The song, found in Deut. 32.1-43, exhorts Israel to recall God’s faithfulness and compassion, which stands in contrast to their foolishness and corruption. The song concludes in a rather dark manner with a call to worship a God who is prepared to take vengeance.

Two other hymns are attributed to Moses. The first is Psalm 90, which contains the superscription “A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.” This psalm, focusing on the brevity of life, is the first psalm of the section identified as “Book Four” in the Psalms.<sup>15</sup> The second is found in Rev. 15.1-4, a song attributed to “Moses, the servant of God” and “the Lamb.” This

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<sup>15</sup> Ironically, this psalm identifies the span of life as 70 or 80, yet Moses actually lived to be 120 years old (Deut. 34.7).

song is performed by those who have conquered the beast, and it extols the great deeds of God the Almighty. The hymn was not written by Moses; rather, it refers to Moses and Jesus (the Lamb) because of their importance to mankind's salvation story. Moses provided salvation for the Israelites; Jesus provides salvation for all of mankind.<sup>16</sup>

Moses' siblings also provide models, both positive and negative. From Miriam we also see the value of musical skill, as well as the important yet mysterious connection between music and prophesy. Through her leadership she helped others respond in worship at a critical moment in Israel's history. Her brother Aaron stands as a negative example of a worship leader—one who not only dismissed his holy calling as a spiritual leader, but inadvertently led the people into idolatry.

#### Summary of the Worship Leadership of Moses, Miriam & Aaron

Although he was far from perfect, Moses made a lasting impact on the worship life of Israel. Joshua summarized the impact of Moses' life in Deut. 34.10: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face..." The writer of Hebrews comments, "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later..." (Heb. 3.5). Although Moses' ministry was at times touched by music through his singing and composing, his broader example is one who answered God's call to service and exhorted his people to give their whole hearts in worship. He attributed glory to God for Israel's deliverance and was unafraid to confront sin when necessary.

#### **David**

Much like Moses, David leaves a giant footprint on the Old Testament, particularly in the arena of worship. The life of David spans from 1 Sam. 16 to 1 Kgs. 2 and is recounted in 1 Chr.

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<sup>16</sup> Thiessen, 128.

11-29, for a total of 61 chapters or roughly 5% of the entire Bible.<sup>17</sup> As Israel's greatest king he led the nation to military victories and brought his people to the pinnacle of their existence.

However, it is his contribution as a worship leader that we will examine here.

David experienced his call from God at a young age. As the youngest of eight sons in the humble town of Bethlehem, he was surely not expected to rise to a position of prominence in Israel, especially not a position that had been dominated by the powerful King Saul. However, the prophet Samuel brought a message of judgment to Saul, recorded in 1 Sam. 15.22-23:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.  
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has also rejected you from being king.”

This passage (echoed later in David's prayer in Ps. 51.16-17) demonstrates that God's primary concern for his leader was the state of his heart. In Saul's heart, God found rebellion, pride and arrogance. But when God searched for a new king, a man with a heart of humility and obedience, he found such a person in David. When the prophet Samuel was directed by God to anoint the new king, he saw Jesse's son Eliab and assumed he had identified the right person. “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’” (1 Sam. 16.7). Samuel anointed David as the new king, although David did not become king until years later. McNeal reflects on David's relationship to his call from God:

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<sup>17</sup> This figure only takes into account the narrative of David's life in the Old Testament and does not include various mentions of his name in the rest of the Bible.

David's life project involved living out his call. He did not adopt the goal of becoming the greatest king in Israel's history. His goal was to live out his call, not to have the call serve him. His own reputation would be bound up in his faithfulness to his call. God's purposes, not his own, captured his life efforts.<sup>18</sup>

David soon found opportunity to express the character and skill worthy of a king chosen by God. After entering Saul's service as a musician playing the lyre, he became one of Saul's armor-bearers. Whenever an evil spirit would torment Saul, David would play the harp and bring him comfort (1 Sam. 16.14-23). He also proved his skill as a warrior when he slew the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17.1-58). But it is precisely his skill and talent that aroused Saul's anger and caused much trouble for David. In Saul, and later in Bathsheba, David found two figures who would put his character to the test.

### David's Character

As David's rank and reputation increased, so did Saul's wrath against him. When the Israelite army was returning home from the battle with the Philistines, a group of women met Saul with tambourines and dancing. They sang, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18.7).<sup>19</sup> This naturally aroused Saul's anger and jealousy. The next day, as David played his lyre for Saul, Saul tried to kill him with a spear (1 Sam. 18.10-11). When David eluded him twice and Saul realized he could not kill him, he attempted to purchase David's loyalty by offering his daughters in marriage. (David married his daughter Michal, who was later stricken as barren by God for criticizing David for a public act of worship.) The Lord was with David, and Saul feared him and became his continual enemy (1 Sam. 18.28-29). A short time later Saul tried to take David's life again, and David fled (1 Sam. 19.9-10).

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<sup>18</sup> Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 27.

<sup>19</sup> David's reputation as a warrior spread outside the borders of Israel, for his enemies the Philistines repeated this refrain in 1 Sam. 21.11 and 29.5.

David dared not retaliate against Saul, whom the Lord had anointed King. Although Saul continued to pursue him, he showed incredible restraint in leaving Saul's fate in the hands of the Lord. In the first instance David and his men were in a cave at En Gedi, and when Saul stepped into the cave David could have taken this perfect opportunity to kill Saul. Although his men urged him to end Saul's life, David cut off a corner of Saul's robe, went out of the cave and fell prostrate before Saul. David said, "Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed'" (1 Sam. 24.10). Even Saul could not help but recognize David's stellar character, for he acknowledged, "You are more righteous than I" (1 Sam. 24.17). Soon thereafter David again discovered that he was being pursued by Saul and his men in the Desert of Ziph, and once again David spared Saul's life (1 Sam. 26.1-25). From these episodes in David's life we see a continual attitude of humility, loyalty and restraint.

Whatever integrity and self-discipline David demonstrated in regards to other men, his restraint all but vanished when it came to the opposite sex. His most glaring error was his adultery with Bathsheba (1 Sam. 11). At a time when kings usually went to war, David remained in Jerusalem and delegated his leadership role to his commander Joab. The text does not tell us why David stayed in Jerusalem,<sup>20</sup> but we soon learn the disastrous consequences of his decision.

When David saw Bathsheba bathing (she is noted as very beautiful in 2 Sam. 11.2), he immediately inquired about her. Knowing full well that she was already married, he had her brought to him and committed adultery with her. Upon hearing the news that she was pregnant, David sent for Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, who was engaged in battle with the army. In 2 Sam.

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<sup>20</sup> Walton, et al. notes, "Kings, because of the duties of state or physical reasons, could not always accompany the army in every campaign. . . . David's decision to remain behind may reflect his confidence in Joab's military skill, a pressing diplomatic matter or his concern with domestic affairs." Walton, et al., 337.

11.6-13 the author presents a stunning contrast between the integrity of Uriah and the deceptive intentions of David. When David planned to send Uriah home, thereby allowing Uriah to engage in relations with his wife and erase any evidence of his adultery, he was unsuccessful and instructed Joab to place Uriah on the front lines of battle so that he would be killed. This plan was carried out, and other men in the army were also killed in the maneuver (11.24). Upon hearing about the death of Uriah, David took Bathsheba as his wife and she subsequently bore him a son . The author concludes the episode with a simple observation: “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Sam. 11.27).

As a result of David’s actions, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to confront him about his sinful deeds. Nathan pronounced the judgment of the Lord: the sword would never depart from his house, evil would rise up from his own family, his neighbors would lie with his wives in the open, and the child born to him and Bathsheba would die (2 Sam. 12.7-14).

The confrontation left its mark on David and made him aware of the depth of his sin,<sup>21</sup> and he simply acknowledged, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam. 12.13). We only see the full depth of his repentance in Psalm 51, which reveals a man understanding the true nature of his sin and crying out for mercy from God. In verses 7-10 David writes,

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.

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<sup>21</sup> David’s sin was indeed deep, and the biblical record makes no attempt to hide it. David’s sins in 1 Sam. 11 include: slothfulness (staying behind in Jerusalem while his army fought and lying on the couch in the afternoon), irresponsibility as a leader (by not accompanying his army to war), lusting after Bathsheba, coveting another man’s wife, adultery with Bathsheba, deception of Uriah (by concealing the true motive of his kindness) and Bathsheba (by concealing the true cause of his death), conspiracy (with Joab) to commit murder, and indirect murder of Uriah and other men in the army.

Here lies the difference between Saul and David. Although they were both men of power and passion who blatantly sinned and rebelled against the Lord, David responded to his sin with a repentant heart and a desire to be restored. When David was confronted by Nathan, surely he recalled Saul's failure to acknowledge his own disobedience and the Lord's subsequent judgment. Perhaps intentionally, he echoes Samuel's words from 1 Sam. 15.22 as he writes in Ps. 51.16-17:

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

These two passages express the same truth in slightly different ways: God is deeply concerned about the state of a leader's heart.<sup>22</sup> While Saul strayed from the Lord and never returned, David acknowledged his sin and remained faithful in God's service. David was far from perfect, and although he committed grave sins against God and others, he demonstrated the character of a man in pursuit of God. It is little wonder that both the Old and New Testaments describe him as a man after God's own heart—a designation given to no one else in Scripture (1 Sam. 13.14, Acts 13.22).

### David as a Musician, Composer and Worship Leader

Our introduction to David as a musician comes in 1 Sam. 16.14-23, when he was chosen to play the lyre for King Saul, who was tormented by an evil spirit from the Lord. Three times in this passage the author emphasizes the *skill* in playing the lyre that was necessary to soothe

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<sup>22</sup> Both passages refer to burnt offering(s) and sacrifices(s). However, 1 Sam. 15.22 expresses the proper attitudes as obeying and listening, while Ps. 51.17 expresses them as a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart. Both point to God's concern for an attitude of humility and obedience. The inward relationship with God is more important than the outward actions of sacrifice.

Saul.<sup>23</sup> One of Saul’s servants recommended David, who is described as “skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him” (1 Sam. 16.18). David entered Saul’s service and was so effective in playing that Saul “loved him greatly” and asked David’s father Jesse if he could remain in his service (1 Sam. 16.21-22).<sup>24</sup>

The instrument played by David is the lyre, the primary string instrument of the Bible and the forerunner to modern stringed instruments such as the violin and guitar.<sup>25</sup> Historian Paul Westermeyer notes, “It was not bowed as our stringed instruments of the violin or viol family are, but probably was a form of the lyre, plucked with the hand or a plectrum<sup>26</sup> as in all ancient stringed instruments.”<sup>27</sup> However, the form of the instrument is not as important as the effect of the music. God’s Spirit coupled with David’s skill produced a remedy that refreshed Saul and drove away the evil spirit (1 Sam. 16.23). This noteworthy chapter of David’s early life speaks of music’s potential for healing and provides the necessary link between David and Saul.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The author intends to draw attention to David’s skill as a musician. In 16.16 Saul’s servants ask to seek out “a man who is skillful in playing the lyre.” In 16.17 Saul asks them to provide “a man who can play well.” In 16.18 David is described as “skillful in playing.”

<sup>24</sup> However, Saul’s love for David is short lived. As previously noted, in 1 Sam. 18-19 Saul tries to kill David twice, both times while David was playing the lyre.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 21.

<sup>26</sup> A plectrum is the ancient equivalent of a guitar pick.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Swindoll notes, “Earliest archaeological records, carvings, and inscriptions show us that the ancients believed music soothed passions, healed mental diseases, and even held in check riots and tumults. It is interesting how God uses this belief to provide the missing link needed to connect David to Saul and the throne.” *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 29.

In addition to playing an instrument, David also created them. In preparation for building the temple (which his son Solomon actually constructed),<sup>29</sup> David reorganized the Levites. Four thousand Levites were set aside to use the instruments he had made (1 Chr. 23.5). 2 Chr. 7.6 speaks of the Levites at the dedication of Solomon's Temple "with the instruments for music to the Lord that King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord." 2 Chr. 29.25-26 twice mentions "instruments of David" played by the Levites. Whether David invented, designed or actually created these instruments is unclear; however, it is certain that his involvement in their creation was so noteworthy that his name was associated with these instruments.

David's skill as a musician and fame as a creative force in the musical life of Israel is noteworthy. However, these contributions are greatly overshadowed by his role as a composer of psalms. Nearly half of the 150 psalms (73 total) are attributed to David.<sup>30</sup> David's psalms range widely in their themes, including the following types: Hymn (103, 145), Individual and Community Songs of Thanksgiving (18, 108), Individual and Community Laments (3, 61, 12), Song of Trust (63, 131), Wisdom (19, 133), Liturgy (24, 268), Royal (21, 101), Messianic (8, 40) and Imprecatory (5, 35, 109).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to many psalms, David composed songs in response to other occasions. He composed laments for Saul, Jonathan and Abner (2 Sam. 2.27-27, 3.31-39). As a musician, David appreciated the power of music to help soothe a sorrowful heart. Certainly many of his psalms gave voice to sorrow and lament. He also composed songs of victory, such as the victory

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<sup>29</sup> For further information on why David did not build the temple, see Steven L. McKenzie, "Why Didn't David Build the Temple?: The History of a Biblical Tradition," in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*, M. Patrick Graham, et al., eds., *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 284* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 204-224.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Hill lists David's psalms as follows: 3-9, 11-32, 34-41, 51-63, 65, 68-70, 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145, in *Enter His Courts with Praise!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 194.

<sup>31</sup> This listing of psalm types is borrowed from Hill, 199-200.

celebration at the return of the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6.1-23, par. 1 Chr. 13.1-14) and deliverance from his enemies (2 Sam. 22.1-51, par. Ps. 18). David's final song is recorded in 2 Sam. 23.1-7, a meditation on the blessing of God upon those who rule justly. The song is preceded by the poignant description of David as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (Ps. 23.1). James Luther Mays notes the intimate connection between David and his compositions: "For the rabbis, David was almost exclusively the psalmist, so much so that all the psalms were ascribed to him who composed them under the inspiration of the Schechinah. . . . His life was one of unceasing praise and thanksgiving to God, nothing more than a context for all the psalms."<sup>32</sup>

A final episode from David's life highlights his role as both a worshiper and leader of worship. After he had been anointed king over a united Israel (2 Sam. 5.1-4), David defeated the Philistines and brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. This was cause for a great celebration and David expressed his joy in a physical way. "David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod" (2 Sam. 6.14). David was not dancing with the intention of drawing attention to himself, but rather to give the glory to God. His intention was likely not to officiate as a priest, but to participate as a worshiper. In this sense he was truly a "lead worshiper." His movement here could suggest a variety of possibilities, including waving his arms or snapping his fingers.<sup>33</sup> David's wife, Michal, looked out of her window, saw David dancing and "despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6.16). When Michal confronted David about his dancing, he twice emphasized that his dancing was "before the Lord" (2 Sam. 6.21). 2 Sam. 6.23 notes that Michal remained childless for the rest of her life, presumably because of her attitude towards David's dance offering to the Lord.

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<sup>32</sup> James Luther Mays, "The David of the Psalms," *Interpretation*, vol. 40, #2 (April 1986), 145.

<sup>33</sup> Walton, et al., 331.

Thiessen comments on the garment worn by David as he danced:

“The linen ephod is also of significance in that it was a priestly garb, not royal or military apparel. Here is the warrior king who has conquered, and instead of leading the parade as a king, he leads it as a priest leading his people in a praise parade to honor God. It is an attempt to direct the glory to Jehovah, and with that divert the attention from himself.”<sup>34</sup>

In this setting David truly functioned as a worship leader who submitted an offering of praise to God through his dance, and led the people in celebrating a momentous occasion as the ark was brought to Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

### Summary of David’s Worship Leadership

Much could be said regarding David’s accomplishments. As arguably the central figure of the Old Testament, and as king, he brought Israel together as one nation, successfully led Israel to many military victories, and paved the way for the rebuilding of the temple. But the Bible never speaks of David as desiring power and prestige. Instead, it presents him as one who simply “served the purposes of God in his own generation” (Acts 13.36).

David’s character solidified his role as a central figure of worship leadership. In the years after his anointing and before he assumed the role of king, he demonstrated patience and a willingness to wait on God’s timing. He showed great restraint when he did not take advantage of his opportunities to kill Saul and take the kingdom by force. Even in his darkest times in the wake of his sin, he revealed a heart for God that was willing to repent and be restored.

Although David was blessed by God with a handsome outward appearance, his heart for God remained his key characteristic that brought him success. Coupled with his skill as a musician and composer, David became an influential force in Israel’s worship. His humble

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<sup>34</sup> Thiessen, 27.

<sup>35</sup> This episode is paralleled in 1 Chr. 15.25-29, but no significant details are added in this account. For further information on David’s life as a worshiper, see Judson Cornwall, *Worship as David Lived It*. Shippensburg, PA: Revival Press, 1990, and Mike Baker, *Counsel Fit for a King: Leadership Lessons from the Old Testament Kings* (Joplin, MO: HeartSpring Publishing, 2003) 44-51.

beginnings as a personal musician to King Saul soon gave way to a more influential role as a composer, psalmist, worship leader and influential force in the creative musical life of Israel.

David displayed great competence and skill as a musician, artist and composer. In addition, he was a skilled leader. As a worshiper, David was also not afraid to display his love for God publicly. However, the key element to his effectiveness as a worship leader was a heart that was broken, contrite, and seeking after the heart of God.

### **Summary of Defining Marks**

In this chapter we have seen character and competence expressed through the lives of Moses and David by the following:

#### *Character*

- Both Moses and David responded to God's call for leadership.<sup>36</sup> God's call formed an essential part of their character and identity.
- Moses demonstrated a heart for God in leading the people's song at the Red Sea.
- Aaron showed a lack of spiritual leadership when he helped the people commit idolatry.
- Moses was not afraid to confront idolatry.
- David showed restraint and integrity in not retaliating after Saul's attacks.
- David's lack of integrity led to adultery, murder and a host of subsequent problems.
- However, he showed a repentant heart when confronted with his sin.
- David demonstrated a heart of worship as he danced when the ark was brought to Jerusalem; in this sense he was truly a "lead worshiper."

#### *Competence*

- Both Moses and David showed leadership ability in their respective roles.
- Moses effectively "led worship" at the Red Sea by involving the people in offering musical praise.
- Miriam showed competence as a prophetess who also led worship at the Red Sea.
- Moses showed skill as a composer of hymns.
- David excelled as a musician, composer and maker of instrument.

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<sup>36</sup> For further reading on Moses' and David's influence as religious leaders in Israel, see Simon J. De Vries, "Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 107, #4 (1988), 619-639.

## CHAPTER 2

### DIRECTING WORSHIP: FAMILY LEADERS, PRIESTS & KINGS

In contrast to Moses and David, the two towering figures of the Old Testament whose shadows loom large over the entire story of worship, this chapter will focus on three groups of people who influenced corporate worship through various means. Before Israel became a nation, family heads provided leadership for their kin. Priests then took on the more formal responsibility of leading the nation in worship. The kings of Israel provided guidance in a monarchical system and, as we shall see, directly influenced the worship life of Israel.

In contemporary evangelical culture, “worship leader” usually refers to the individual who leads congregational singing. But worship leadership in the sense we are examining it is a much broader concept that involves influencing the corporate worship life of a group of people. Family heads, priests and kings in Israel were not necessarily musical leaders, but they directly influenced the worship of their people. They were *directors* of worship whose character and competence (or lack thereof) allowed them to guide worship for the good or ill of the people.

#### **Family Leaders**

The first true “worship leaders” in biblical history were the heads of families and tribes. Before the institution and organization of the nation of Israel, these men led their families and communities in acts of worship.

## The Patriarchs

Noah, though not a “patriarch” in the strict sense, is the first one to lead his family in worship. After the great flood subsided, Noah left the ark with his family and built an altar to the Lord, where he sacrificed burnt offerings (Gen. 8.18-20). The Lord responded by promising to never again curse the ground or strike down every living creature (8.21). The word used here for “sacrifice” literally means “to ascend,” thereby designating an offering that rises up to God.<sup>1</sup>

When Abraham, the first of the patriarchs, heard and obeyed the Lord’s call to leave his home and go to the place the Lord would show him, he came to Shechem. There God appeared to him and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” As a result, Abraham built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12.1-7). He continually repeated this pattern and called on the Lord’s name in response to God’s faithfulness and provision (Gen. 12.8; 13.5, 18; 21.33). At times he bowed or fell on his face in worship (Gen. 17.3, 18.2). He offered the first tithe recorded in Scripture when the priest Melchizedek brought bread and wine and pronounced a blessing on him (14.17-20). Abraham also demonstrated true worship by his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. On the way to the sacrifice Abraham stated, “I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you” (Gen. 22.5). Abraham’s worship was tied directly to his faith and obedience (Gen. 11.8,17), and throughout his life, he led his family in worship that expressed itself by “calling on the name of the Lord,” building altars, and simply obeying God.

Isaac followed the example of his father and worshiped the Lord.<sup>2</sup> When he went to Beersheba, the Lord appeared to him and promised to bless him and multiply his offspring. Isaac

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<sup>1</sup> G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis, Vol. 1* in *The Bible Student’s Commentary*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 179.

<sup>2</sup> It is ironic that Isaac himself almost died at the hands of his father in an act of worship (Gen. 22.1-14).

then “built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there” (Gen. 26.24-25).<sup>3</sup>

Jacob led his family in various forms of worship. After he dreamed of a ladder reaching to Heaven, and heard God’s promise to bless his offspring, he set up his stone pillow as a pillar and anointed it with oil. He called the place “Bethel,” vowing that the pillar would be God’s house, and promised to return to God a tenth of everything he would receive (Gen. 28.11-22). After he was reconciled to his estranged brother Esau, Jacob built an altar at Schechem and called it “El-Elohe-Israel,” meaning “God, the God of Israel” (Gen. 33.20). When God instructed Jacob to make an altar at Bethel, he took the foreign gods from his household and hid them under a tree. He named the altar “El-Bethel” (“God of Bethel”), and there also set up a pillar of stone, upon which he poured a drink offering and oil (Gen. 35.1-4, 14). Here at Bethel (literally, “house of God”) God changed Jacob’s name to “Israel” (Gen. 35.10). Even unto the end of his life, Jacob worshiped the Lord. As he blessed the sons of Joseph, he was “bowing in worship over the head of his staff” (Heb. 11.21).

Though he is not featured in the Genesis story, Job lived during the time of the patriarchs. He was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1.1). He offered burnt offerings for the sake of his family and offered prayers on behalf of his friends who had sinned (Job 1.5; 42.8-9).

In all of these examples we see men who led their families in worship, primarily by exhibiting humility and reverence toward God, making sacrifices and building altars, and generally providing an example of worship. For our purposes, the primary contribution the

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<sup>3</sup> The text does not specifically mention Isaac’s family, but we can safely assume they were with him since both his wife and servants are mentioned in this chapter (Gen. 26.7, 25).

Patriarchs made is that of godly character displayed through an attitude of reverence to God, worship lived out in daily life, and leadership in their families.

### Tribal Leaders

In the modern world, nations are divided into states and cities, and the people living in those locales may have very little in common except for their geographical proximity. Their identity is not primarily associated with where they live. By contrast, the ancient Israelites were marked not only by their status as the chosen people of God, but also by their identity as individual tribes. Within these tribes certain leaders and elders held responsibility for giving guidance in worship.

During the Passover, Moses instructed the elders of Israel to select lambs “according to your clans” (Ex. 12.21). Later in the book of Numbers, after Moses had set up the tabernacle, “the chiefs of Israel, heads of their fathers’ houses who were the chiefs of the tribes, who were over those who were listed, approached and brought their offerings before the Lord . . . they brought them before the tabernacle” (Num. 7.2-3). The heads of the household were responsible for ensuring that proper offerings and worship were given to the Lord, particularly in the city of Jerusalem, “to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord” (Ps. 122.3).

Families and tribes were the primary divisions by which Israelites were identified. This was especially true in regards to the Feast of Booths. Richard Leonard notes that “each home erected a shelter and lived in it for the duration of the festival (Lev. 23.42; Neh. 8.14-16). It was the responsibility of family heads to arrange for participation in these festivals and to preside over the family’s observance.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Richard C. Leonard, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, vol. 1 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 163.

In addition to the heads of families, the elders of Israel were responsible for leading in worship. The council or assembly of the elders was a group of influence within Israel. “Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders” (Ps. 107.32). Even in times of repentance, the elders were encouraged to take leadership, as in Joel. 1.14: “Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.”

### Summary of the Worship Leadership of Family Heads

Whether patriarchs, heads of the family, or elders, the leaders of these groups within ancient Israel were held responsible by God to provide spiritual leadership and direction in the worship of God. This worship took various forms: erecting altars and pillars, calling on the name of the Lord, leading in prayer and praise, giving offerings, and participating in feasts. However, it was all for the purpose of giving practical guidance to the worship of God. In ancient Israel, worship leadership truly began at home. This involved the character to submit to God in worship, as well as the competence to lead in the practices of worship in a way that honored God. Paul spoke of the importance of the home life of a leader in 1 Tim. 3.4-5 when giving the qualifications for overseers in the church: “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”

### **Priests**

Although the formal priesthood in Israel did not develop until the time of Moses, one priest made an appearance during the time of the patriarchs. Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem whose name means “king of righteousness,” came to Abraham after he defeated

Chederlaomer and his allies. He offered Abraham bread and wine and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything (Gen. 14.18-19). Melchizedek was the archetype of the Old Testament priesthood (Heb. 7.12-13), but more importantly the forerunner to Christ's role as ultimate High Priest. The author of Hebrews refers to Christ as greater than Melchizedek when he quotes Ps. 110.4: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7.17).<sup>5</sup> This first hint of a priestly figure in the Old Testament provides a fitting introduction to the primary role of the priest: a mediator between God and his covenant people.

### Establishment of the Priests

Under the Mosaic covenant established at Mt. Sinai, the priesthood was established and fulfilled a central role in Israel's religious life. The entire nation of Israel was devoted to the Lord, and indeed was the Lord's "treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19.5-6). However, the priests were a group of religious leaders who were set apart for the Lord's service. All priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi, and received their support from the offerings and tithes of the other tribes, as well as some of the sacrificial offerings given by the Israelites (Lev. 7.28-36, Deut. 14.26-29). They served full-time in the Lord's service for twenty years, from age 30 to 50, and the text suggests that they served a 5-year apprenticeship.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most significant ways the priests (and larger community of Levites) differed from the other tribes was a lack of inheritance. Whereas the other tribes received a portion of the promised land, the priests and Levites were instructed to dwell in forty-eight cities throughout the land (Num. 35.1-4). They had no need of a physical allotment, since as the Lord said to

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<sup>5</sup> Melchizedek was the only person whom Abraham recognized as his spiritual superior. This is why Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, and not of the Levites—for Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, and the Levites descended from Abraham. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 54.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise! Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 139.

Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel” (Num. 18.20). In addition, six of these cities were “cities of refuge,” a safe harbor for those guilty of involuntary manslaughter (Num. 35.9-15). The guilty could take refuge in these cities without fear of being killed by his avenger, and had to remain there until the death of the high priest (Num. 35.25).<sup>7</sup>

Thus there was the establishment of a special order of people set apart specifically for God’s service. As we shall see, they were distinct from the rest of Israel because of who they were (character) and what they were to do (competence).

### Organization and Responsibilities of the Priests

The entire nation of Israel was a people set apart to be God’s own. But within the nation, the Levites, priests and high priest were designated for specialized service, and each group was set apart for a different level of holiness. Regarding the basic priestly roles, Andrew Hill notes:

Priestly duties basically fell into two categories: superintending tabernacle/temple worship, including representing the Israelite community before the Lord as mediator and intercessor, and instructing the people of God in the Law of Moses—especially personnel and corporate holiness and covenant obedience and the declaration of the will of God to his people through oracles and the handling of the Urim and Thummim (Exod. 29:30; Lev. 8:8, Deut. 33.8-10).<sup>8</sup>

### *The Levites*

The Levites as a tribe were set apart by the Lord for specific service in the tabernacle (and later, the temple).<sup>9</sup> The more specialized group of priests were taken out of the Levites, so

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Hill notes, “This network of refuge cities was designed to prevent further death by interrupting the cycle of blood vengeance commonly practiced in the ancient Near East—the obligation of the nearest male relative of the deceased to avenge the death of his kinsman.” Ibid, 140.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Num. 3.1-13 notes, “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be

that only Aaron and his descendants could function as priests. The remainder of the Levites not descended from Aaron were assigned other duties in the Lord's service. In the wilderness period, this included transporting the items associated with the tabernacle. But when the temple was erected this type of service was no longer needed, so King David reorganized the Levites. The Chronicler notes, "For their duty was to assist the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the LORD, having the care of the courts and the chambers, the cleansing of all that is holy, and any work for the service of the house of God" (1 Chr. 23.28).

Other Levite responsibilities included handling the food items associated with the temple, standing and praising God at designated times, and serving in the house of the Lord under the direction of the Aaronic priests (1 Chr. 23.29-32).<sup>10</sup> The musical duties of the Levites also formed a significant part of their ministry, as will be noted in Chapter 3. Thus, the Levites required a measure of skill and competence in their respective responsibilities if they were to successfully serve the Lord.

### *The Aaronic Priesthood*

This group of Levites was comprised of males who were born of the line of Aaron, and were age thirty to fifty. They were priests not only in identity (as was the nation of Israel as a whole, along with the Levites to an even greater degree) but also in duty and vocation. The main function of the Aaronic priests was to be mediators between God and his covenant people. As such, they were required to abide by the holiness regulations of the Mosaic law (Lev. 21.1-9, 16-24). Under guidance of the high priest, these priests presided over sacrifices and offerings.

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mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.”

<sup>10</sup> For all intents and purposes, the term “Levites” refers to members of that tribe who were not Aaron’s descendants, but still functioned in subordinate roles under the priests. This is the distinction between the “Levitical priests” and the “Aaronic priests.”

Leviticus 4-7 gives specific instructions for the people and priests in regards to burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. The priests led worship in corporate gatherings and festivals, transported the ark of the covenant before David returned it to Jerusalem, and enforced Mosaic law as it pertained to ritual purity (Deut. 10.8; Lev. 13-14). The priests were held to a high standard of personal holiness and vocational excellence.

One of the primary responsibilities of priests was to educate and instruct the Israelite people in the Mosaic law. Moses and the Levitical priests had given direct instructions to Israel: “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today” (Deut. 27.9-10). If they were to receive the protection and blessings of the Lord, they must obey his commands (cf. the “blessings and curses” of Deut. 28). Therefore, the priests served a vital role in keeping the Lord’s requirements constantly before the people. Their education and instruction was to supplement the training that occurred in each home (Deut. 6.1-9). Their teaching ministry also extended to kings, judges and other leaders as they acted in an advisory role at times (Jud. 18.18-19, 1 Sam. 14.36-27, 21.6-9). The entire nation of Israel depended upon the knowledge and ability of the priests to teach the Word of the Lord with accuracy. The priests led the people in worshiping the Lord through their own service and example, as well as their ministry as mediators and teachers.

### *The High Priest*

Aaron, the first high priest, was “chief among his brothers” and the highest member of the priesthood. His primary role was to represent Israel before God, and act as God’s chief mediator to Israel. He also officiated in the sacrificial worship of the temple (Lev. 4.3-21) and supervised the priests who served under him. He was the only priest allowed to enter Most Holy

Place on the Day of Atonement, an act of worship occurring only once a year (Lev. 16, Deut. 30.10). As a model of holiness and purity, the high priest was held to a more strict set of regulations than other priests (Lev. 21.10-15). He was also responsible for handling the Urim and Thummim, two articles that helped determine the Lord's will in various situations (Num. 27.21; Deut. 33.8; 1 Sam. 14.41, 28.6).<sup>11</sup> The high priest was held to the highest standard of personal conduct and was to live in holiness and purity.

The high priest and subordinate Aaronic priests were set apart not only through their holiness and service, but through their dress as well. Appendix B: Priestly Garments outlines the unique nature of the garments worn by the priests, in which we see the an outward reflection of the inward spiritual reality that the priests were set apart for service. God desired excellence both in their hearts and in the practical realities of their dress.

### Summary of Priestly Duties

How did the priests function as worship leaders? Andrew Hill has succinctly summarized the main duties of the priests in relation to corporate worship:

- Organize and lead Israel in corporate worship. This included the forms, times and places of worship (Ex. 40.12-15; Lev. 1-10).
- Make atonement for sin and intercede to God on Israel's behalf by overseeing sacrificial worship and handling the blood of sin and guilt offerings (Lev. 1-7).
- Serve as mediator between God and his covenant people, at times representing Israel before God (as in the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16) and at times representing God before Israel (as in 1 Sam. 8).
- Decide on matters related to Mosaic law, thereby safeguarding Israel from breaching the covenant relationship with God (Lev. 11-15; Num. 5)
- Interpret the Mosaic law and advise the people in regard to covenant obedience and purity (cf. Deut. 17.8-13), at the risk of covenant curses, which included the loss of their inheritance, namely the promised land. When this indeed came to pass, the prophets indicted Israel's leaders, including the priests, because they failed to properly instruct the people in the ways of the Lord (Hos. 4.4-6, 6.9; Mic. 3.11; Zeph. 3.4; esp. Mal. 2.7-9).

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, 141.

- Advise and counsel the people and their civic leaders at given times (Judg. 18.18-19, 1 Sam. 14.36-27).
- Provide a living model of faith, purity, obedience and worship for families and their heads so that proper worship could take place in the home (Deut. 6.2-9).<sup>12</sup>

### Summary of the Priests' Worship Leadership

The priests of Israel are a sterling example of leaders of worship who were to combine both character and competence. Through their personal holiness and purity, special garments, and personal example they were to model integrity of heart. Of course, the priests did not always live up to this standard (Jer. 23.1-4, the book of Malachi). Additionally, they demonstrated competence in a number of areas, including teaching God's word, officiating at sacrifices, counseling the people and making judgments.

### **The King as Royal Priest**

It is commonly thought that the Hebrew kingship was a "second thought" or "plan B" in God's overall plan for His people. Israel was to be a theocracy, a kingdom ruled by God alone, not a human king. However, the Mosaic law indeed made provision for a human king and laid down guidelines for his choosing. The king was to be a fellow Hebrew, chosen by God, and was forbidden to acquire "many horses,"<sup>13</sup> many wives<sup>14</sup>, or excessive gold or silver. The King in the Old Testament is typically pictured as a political leader, planning military strategy, administrating the kingdom and overseeing various projects. Yet at times the king functioned as a worship leader, even performing ministry normally associated with priests.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 147-48.

<sup>13</sup> This sentiment of this regulation is echoed by David in Ps. 20.7: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

<sup>14</sup> This stipulation was obliterated by Solomon, who "had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kgs. 11.3).

When King David had the ark brought to Jerusalem, he personally sacrificed an ox and fattened animal every six steps (2 Sam. 6.13). Later, when he sinned by taking a census, and was punished with a plague that killed 70,000 Israelites, he built an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. There he made burnt offerings and peace offerings, and the Lord stopped the plague (2 Sam. 24.18-25). At times David also appointed priests (2 Sam. 8.17, 20.25).

King Solomon led a worship ceremony to dedicate his new temple. On this occasion he blessed the assembly of Israel (1 Kgs. 8.14), prayed on their behalf (1 Kgs. 8.22-53), and made animal sacrifices (1 Kgs. 8.62-63). Solomon also dismissed Abiathar the priest (1 Kgs. 2.27). Other instances of kings performing priestly duties include Jehoshaphat organizing the temple repair (2 Kgs. 12.4-8) and Josiah instituting worship reforms and temple repair (2 Kgs. 22-23).

Israel's king was not always welcome to perform priestly acts of worship. King Saul made an unlawful sacrifice and the kingdom was taken from him as a result (1 Sam. 13.8-14). Another intriguing instance involved King Uzziah, who was prideful and unfaithful. When he entered the temple to burn incense, Azariah the high priest and eighty other priests followed him and exclaimed, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God." Uzziah then became angry and broke out with leprosy on his forehead, a condition he suffered until his death (2 Chr. 26.16-21).

David and Solomon performed priestly acts that were deemed acceptable, but Saul and Uzziah's acts of worship were condemned. Why the difference? Andrew Hill explains,

The issue seems to be one of authority and sanction and not the king's participation in the religious duties of the priests. It appears that the king had the right to function as a priest in Israel as long as he did so with the blessing and under the jurisdiction of the Levitical priesthood . . . Note in the cases of kings Saul and Uzziah, they both usurped priestly function without priestly authority. Thus they performed priestly acts of worship

independently rather than in conjunction with the divinely ordained priesthood (1 Sam. 13:13; 2 Chr. 26.18).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the issue seems to be the attitude of the heart with which the king performed the priestly acts, and his willingness to act under the supervision of the spiritual authorities. This is echoed in the Mosaic law, which prescribed that the Levitical priests would act in a supervisory role to establish the king's knowledge of the law at the inauguration of his rule (Deut. 17.18-19).

A. S. Herbert describes the king as the most important functionary in Israel's cultus in pre-exilic days.<sup>16</sup> The people as a whole had their "psychic center" in the king, and for all intents and purposes the king *was* Israel when exercising royal functions. The king enjoyed a special relationship with Yahweh; indeed, he was "called" to be the king.<sup>17</sup> When the king offered sacrifices or performed other royal acts, it was essential that they be "correctly performed in order to maintain the integrity of Israel."<sup>18</sup> But the king's primary concern was not simply to carry out activity; rather, his main requirements were "loyalty, obedience to ethical demands, and faith. . . . loyalty to the Covenant God and the covenant people, and the promotion of justice in the life of society."<sup>19</sup> The king was to perform his duties with excellence and his reign was to reflect the characteristics of God himself.

### Summary of the Kings' Worship Leadership

The kings of Israel primarily functioned as God's chief minister and leader for his people, although at times they were directly involved in priestly ministry, with mixed results. The most

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>16</sup> "Cultus" here refers to the religious traditions or rituals of Israel, not a "cult" in the modern sense, with the accompanying negative connotations.

<sup>17</sup> A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1959), 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 36.

fascinating aspect of the king’s role as worship leader is revealed in the historical books, which often directly link the spiritual life of the king (whether positive or negative) with the spiritual state of the nation. As the king went, so did the entire nation. More often than not, the leaders—and subsequently the nation—did “what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” See Appendix C: “Kings of Israel & Judah Linked with the Nation’s Decline” for a list of the kings of Israel and Judah whose sin is linked either directly or indirectly with the decline of the nation.

### **Summary of Defining Marks**

In summarizing the overall picture of worship, Walter Brueggemann states,

Broadly we may say that worship in the biblical tradition that eventuates in Christian practice consists in regular, ordered, public, disciplined resituation of the life of the community of faith and of each of its members in the presence of the God who has called that community into existence and who continues to call that community into a life of praise and obedience.<sup>20</sup>

This chapter has outlined three key groups of people who sometimes aided this process of “regular, ordered, public” worship, and also hindered it at times. We have witnessed both character and competence expressed in the lives of family heads, priests and kings through the following:

#### *Character*

- The patriarchs, elders and other family group leaders lived out worship in their daily lives, built altars and made sacrifices as needed.
- These figures were also called to establish a home of reverence and honor unto the Lord. They were to lead by their obedience, faith and character.
- As mediators between God and his people, the priests were to be holy, set apart and distinct, with an attitude of service. They were to abide by the Mosaic holiness regulations.
- The high priest was to be a model of holiness and purity in his conduct.
- The garments worn by the priests reflected their status as those “set apart.”

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<sup>20</sup> Walter E. Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 1.

- The king's most important quality was that of being faithful to the covenant established by Israel and God. The spiritual state of the nation directly reflected the spiritual state of the king. The king had the most direct influence over the worship life of the nation.

### *Competence*

- The patriarchs, elders and other family group leaders were skilled in carrying out the necessary rituals and other worship acts required by their specific needs. They led not only in character, but also in the practical aspects of worship.
- The priests were to carry out their temple duties with excellence and faithfulness. This included presiding over sacrifices, making offerings, teaching the Word, giving counsel and making judgments.
- The priests' garments were a visual reminder that God placed value on craftsmanship and skill.
- The king was to perform all of his royal duties with excellence. At times, this included aspects of worship such as making sacrifices and offerings and participating in public acts of worship.

## CHAPTER 3

### CELEBRATING WORSHIP: THE LEVITES

In the contemporary church, the primary way we express our worship is through the musical arts. Music allows us to celebrate our faith in ways that speak to the senses and connect with the emotions. Although the Old Testament contains much information about other art forms<sup>1</sup> and mentions other musicians as well, the Levites enjoyed the privilege and honor of leading Israel in the celebration of music praise. They most closely resemble the musical functions of contemporary worship leaders, and in them we witness both the character and competence that is necessary for effective worship leadership.

#### **Establishment and Organization**

The term “Levites” as used in the Old Testament can be confusing. At times it refers to the whole tribe descended from Levi (Ex. 6.25, Lev. 25.32, Josh. 21.3). At other times it is used to distinguish the members of the tribe who were not priests, so as to separate the two groups. The term “Levitical” is also used as a modifier, as in “Levitical priests” (Josh. 3.3, Ezek. 44.15). Although it is not always clear how the priests and Levites were separated, in general the priests were a special group of Levites dedicated to sacrificial service. The Levites also served in the tabernacle and temple, although they did not usually assist with sacrifices. In effect, all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the role of the arts in the Bible, see: William A. Dyrness, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 28, #4 (Dec. 1985), 421-432; John P. Newport, “The Arts in Worship,” *Review & Expositor*, vol. 80, #1 (Winter 1983), 71-83; Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts With Praise*, 211-220; Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983); Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly About the Arts* (Colorado Springs: Shaw, 1989).

The Levites were not consecrated as a priesthood until the incident of the worship of the golden calf at Mt. Sinai in Ex. 32. Until this point in Israel's history, the first-born of each family acted as its spiritual representative. But when Moses returned to his people from receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, he saw the idol worship that had ensued in his absence. Only the Levites remained faithful to the Lord in the midst of this idolatry, and were therefore consecrated to his service (Ex. 32.26-29; Lev. 8.1-36). Lev. 11.44-45 outlines God's intention for this people set apart: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy...For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

The Levites were divided into three groups corresponding to the sons of Levi: Kohath, Gershon and Merari. The Kohathites, as the "first among equals," were charged with service that "involved the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which the priests minister, and the screen; all the service connected with these" (Num. 3.31). They were to carry the furnishings of the sanctuary, but they were to be careful not to touch the holy things, for they would die. They could not even look at the holy things without penalty of death (Num. 4.15, 20). They were also to carry the ark of the covenant itself (Deut. 31.25). The Gershonites were charged with bearing the various curtains, screens, cords and other equipment for the tabernacle and tent of meeting (Num. 4.24-26). The Merarites were given the responsibility of carrying the heaviest items—the frames, bars, pillars, bases, and other accessories and equipment associated with the tabernacle (Num. 4.31-32).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Even at this early stage in Israelite history, before the more complex and established systems of the Temple, there was a clear division between priests, Levites and the general Israelite population. There were unmistakable grades of holiness between these groups. Martin Klingbeil notes, "The tripartite division of Israelite religious spectrum (i.e., "lay" Israelite → Levite → priest) is reflected in ritual and legal texts from the Pentateuch . . . and this division is also clearly visible in the Chronicler . . . This division should not automatically be understood in terms of confrontation or competition, but rather should be seen in terms of complementation . . . Priests were serving directly at the altar/temple, while Levites performed duties not directly connected to the sacrificial cult. The regular

However, the Levites did not always behave according to the holiness expected of them. One of the most significant crises occurred in Numbers 16, when a man named Korah gathered together with 250 “chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men.” They came before Moses with a grievance that he and Aaron had set themselves above the rest of the people. The group exclaimed to Moses, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?” (Num. 16.3). Korah and those siding with him were angered because they were not chosen as priests, but rather were assigned to the lower task of serving in the tabernacle. As a result of their rebellion, the households of Korah, Dathan and Abiram perished when the earth split open and swallowed them (Num. 16.31-33). The 250 men who stood with Korah were consumed by fire from the Lord as they were offering incense (Num. 16.35). Eleazar the priest took their censers and made a covering for the altar as a reminder to the people that no unauthorized person was to burn incense before the Lord (Num. 16.39-40). The death toll from this incident climbed to 14,700 when a plague came upon the people who grumbled against Moses because of Korah and his associates’ deaths.

### Summary

God desired his people to be set apart from the nations around them, and within this nation God set apart the Levites to represent Israel before Him. Out of the Levites priests were chosen, and finally a high priest stood as the final spiritual authority in the nation. Despite unfortunate incidents such as Korah’s rebellion, the Levites stood as a living reminder during the post-Exodus period of God’s holiness and righteousness. Their most important feature was their

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Israelite was both participant and observer in this ritual drama and represented the lowest grade of holiness in the biblical spectrum.” “Priests and Levites,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 815.

character, holiness and purity. The Levites would reach their true pinnacle during the reigns of David and Solomon. We now turn our attention to that period in Israel's history and the vital contribution the Levites made to the worship and musical life of Israel.

### **The Levites as Musicians and Worship Leaders**

Most of the information in the Bible concerning the Levites' music occurs in 1-2 Chronicles, where we will focus our attention.<sup>3</sup> Although the Levites' responsibilities extended beyond that of music,<sup>4</sup> here we will focus on their musical contribution.

Since 1-2 Chronicles repeats much information from 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, it is curious that the priests and Levites receive greater attention in Chronicles. In fact, the biblical books describing the pre-monarchical and monarchical periods (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) mention the priests and Levites<sup>5</sup> in an average of 3-4% of the verses, while the books written in the post-exilic period (1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah) mention the priests and Levites in an average of 10-11% of verses.<sup>6</sup> This reflects the greater importance of these groups in the leadership of Israel in the absence of a king, and also points to the intention of the Chronicler to reveal different details about the events of the period. In any case, the Levites fulfilled a critical role in the worship life of Israel as musicians.

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<sup>3</sup> Although they also continue their story in Ezra and Nehemiah, we will focus our attention on Chronicles since it illustrates the Levites' ministry for our purposes here.

<sup>4</sup> Although here we are focusing on the Levites' ministry of music, their primary responsibility before the construction of the temple seems to have been moving the ark of the covenant when it was necessary (see Josh. 3.3, 8.33; 1 Sam. 6.15; 2 Sam 15.24; 1 Chr. 13.2, 15.2, 4, 15, 26; 23.26, 27; 2 Chr. 5.4; 35.3) (Klingbeil, 812).

<sup>5</sup> The priests and Levites are often mentioned together, although scholars have not come to a consensus on the precise nature of their relationship (Ibid., 811).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 812.

## The Levites in 1 Chronicles

Taken together, 1-2 Chronicles relates details about the musical duties of the Levites that are not found in either Samuel or Kings. In 1 Chr. 6.16-48 we learn about the tribal groups responsible for music in the tabernacle as well as three men who are specifically named as leaders, each related to a larger Levite family: Heman the singer, from the tribe of Kohath (1 Chr. 6.33, 38); his brother Asaph, from the tribe of Gershom (1 Chr. 6.39, 43); and Ethan, from the tribe of Merari (1 Chr. 6.44, 47). “These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order” (1 Chr. 6.31-32). Each of these leaders made at least one contribution to the Book of Psalms.<sup>7</sup> (See Appendix D: “The Psalms: Voicing Worship” for a detailed examination of the psalmists’ contribution to Israel’s worship life.)

These were no ordinary musicians. 1 Kgs. 4.31 speaks of Solomon: “For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than *Ethan the Ezrahite*, and *Heman*, *Calcol*, and *Darda*, the sons of Mahol. . . .” (italics added).<sup>8</sup> The author is telling us that if it were not for Solomon, two of the wisest men in the land would have been musical leaders! Furthermore, as composers of hymns these musicians communicated deep theological truths. They were influential figures who combined theological depth, wisdom and musical skill.

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<sup>7</sup> Authorship is attributed as follows: Heman (Psalm 88), Asaph (Psalms 73-83), Ethan (Psalm 89). The sons of Korah were apparently gifted musically since many psalms are attributed to them (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87, 88). (See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 49.) Obviously they did not perish in the rebellion Korah began in Numbers 16.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard R. Payton, *Reforming Our Worship Music* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 21.

The Chronicler takes a brief detour in 1 Chr. 9 to review the names of the exiles who returned from Babylon. The author notes the place of leadership and responsibility held by the spiritual leaders, because “the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants” (1 Chr. 9.2). 1 Chr. 9:33 notes, “Now these, the singers, the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites, were in the chambers of the temple free from other service, they were on duty day and night.” The Levites, at least upon return from the exile, were expected to be “full-time” in ministry, devoting their full attention to the service of the temple. They gained their support from the tithes of the people and owned no land.

As the Chronicler returns to the historical narrative, we are given more details about the musical duties of the Levites. In 1 Chr. 13 we are told of David’s plans to bring the ark from Kiriath-jearim.<sup>9</sup> He had consulted with the leaders and agreed it was a profitable thing to do. As the ark came from the house of Abinidab, “David and all Israel were rejoicing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets” (1 Chr. 13.8). A variety of musical expression is mentioned here: song, lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets.<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that David and the people were celebrating with *all their might*—this was a no-holds-barred celebration worthy of their greatest efforts before the Lord! The excellence and vitality of the music paved the way for expressive, passionate worship.

However, the celebration is disrupted by an unfortunate mistake. When Uzzah, one of the men driving the cart carrying the ark, reached out to steady the ark, “the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down . . .” (1 Chr. 13.9-10). Certainly Uzzah’s intention to steady the ark was a good one; however, the Lord had specifically commanded that

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Chr. 13.1-14, as well as 15.16-29, are paralleled in 2 Sam. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Thiessen, 36.

poles be used to transport the ark (Ex. 25.14-15); the ark was not to be touched. Furthermore, only the Levites were to be in proximity of the ark; everyone else was to keep a distance (Josh. 3.4). The text does not indicate whether Uzzah was a Levite. Even if he was, he violated the commands of the Lord. The careless methods in which the Levites carried out their ministry resulted in one man's death, and certainly served as a reminder to those who witnessed it. King David soon corrected this mistake and ordered that no one but Levites carry the ark, and they used poles instead of a cart (1 Chr. 15.2, 15). Clearly they had learned to fulfill their ministry with excellence and attention to detail, rather than approach it with a careless attitude.

As David prepared to transport the ark from Obed-edom to Jerusalem, he appointed Levite musicians to help lead the procession. Three leaders are once again named: Heman, Asaph and Ethan (1 Chr. 15.17). They were the primary singers, but many other instruments are mentioned in 1 Chr. 15.16-19: horn, trumpets, cymbals, harps and lyres. They were to “play loudly on musical instruments . . . to raise the sounds of joy” (1 Chr. 15.16). Several men were to “lead with lyres according to the Sheminith” (1 Chr. 15.21). Chenaniah was a prominent figure here, for he was “the leader of the Levites in music,” and he “should direct the music, for he understood it” (1 Chr. 15.22). The NASB translates, “he gave instruction in singing because he was skillful.” Andrew Hill notes that the “citation of Kenaniah as a musical director of sorts references his ‘skill’ (or perhaps ‘musical knowledge’), suggesting the appointments of the Levites as singers and musicians may have been based on some type of audition.”<sup>11</sup>

In this procession we should also note the dress of the Levites. “David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers and

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 236. For further information on the possible musical training and practices of the Levites, see Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 489-492.

Chenemiah the leader of the music of the singers. And David wore a linen ephod” (1 Chr. 15.27). This was an occasion for giving the Lord their very best, both in music and in appearance.

When the ark was finally brought to Jerusalem and set inside the tabernacle, David appointed Levites to minister before it each day. Asaph was made chief in addition to playing the cymbals, and others were appointed to play various other instruments (1 Chr. 16.4-6, 42). David singled out Asaph and his brothers to sing a song of thanksgiving (1 Chr. 16.8-36). This event represented a turning point of sorts for the Levites. Although they had been involved in tabernacle service, it was here that David appointed them for praise and music service in the temple. Their tabernacle duties had changed now that the ark was brought back to Jerusalem.

Although the return of the ark to Jerusalem and its placement in the tabernacle was a cause for celebration, the tabernacle itself was only designed as a temporary meeting place between Israel and their God. The temple was designed to be a more permanent structure, not only to house the holy artifacts including the ark of the covenant, but to be a central place of the utmost religious significance. As David made preparations to construct the temple (a task his son Solomon would actually complete), he took a census of the priests and Levites. The Levites thirty years and older numbered 38,000, and 4,000 of these men were set aside to offer praises to the Lord with instruments made by David (1 Chr. 23.4-6).

Musicians clearly held a place in David’s heart, since over ten percent of the entire Levite male population of working age was set aside for instrumental music in the temple! Although the Lord had chosen the Levites to be a tribe set apart from the rest of Israel, David elevated them to a significant role in his kingdom. After David organized the Levites and then the priests, he turned his attention specifically to the musicians who were to serve in the temple. 1 Chr. 25.1-7 illustrates how they were organized. Although it is too lengthy to reproduce here, several

observations are worth mentioning. First, the text mentions the leaders as Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun.<sup>12</sup> They were “musical prophets” who spoke the word of the Lord (1 Chr. 25.1, 3) by expounding, teaching or proclaiming the Mosaic law with God’s authority.<sup>13</sup> Second, there was a clear plan of leadership for these musicians, most of whom served under someone’s direction (1 Chr. 25.2, 3, 6). (Those who were musical leaders, such as Asaph, served under the direction of the king.) Third, and most importantly, this passage identifies 288 skilled singers. Donald Thiessen notes, “Although the temple musicians were all chosen from the Levitical tribe, they were not automatically in a choir or orchestra. The individuals who were chosen were trained to the point where they were then considered skillful in their field of musical endeavor.”<sup>14</sup>

#### The Levites in 2 Chronicles

Once the temple was constructed under Solomon’s leadership, all Israel participated in a grand worship event. The priests brought the ark into the temple and the Levites responded with music (as recorded in 2 Chr. 5.11-14). The number of priestly trumpeters was 120,<sup>15</sup> but we can assume there were at least 288 singers in this celebration.<sup>16</sup> The motivation for their music was to give praise to the Lord, rather than directing attention to themselves. As a result of their

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<sup>12</sup> This stands in contrast to 1 Chr. 6.16-48, where the list is Asaph, Heman and Ethan. The author of Chronicles does not explain the difference.

<sup>13</sup> Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 310. Alfred Sendrey expands upon the possible nature of their prophesy: “The gift of singing and of writing poetry was summed up under the general term ‘prophecy’ by the Israelites. Therefore, the prophets and seers among the levitical singers mentioned in the Old Testament by their names . . . must have not only been excellenct singer-musicians, but also distinguished poets. Their accomplishments were, in fact, so outstanding even among the generally prominent levitical singers that the chroniclers were induced to preserve their individual names for posterity.” Sendrey, 515.

<sup>14</sup> Thiessen, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Hill holds that “The 120 priests are probably a group of ad hoc musicians who are off-duty from their usual service rotation.” *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 391.

<sup>16</sup> Thiessen, 44.

praise, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. As Solomon continued the dedication service and joined with the people in making sacrifices to the Lord, the priests and Levites offered antiphonal praise,<sup>17</sup> with the Levites on one side with their instruments, and the priests opposite them with their trumpets (2 Chr. 7.4-6). The temple dedication lasted seven days (2 Chr. 7.7).

Several final events in 1 & 2 Chronicles demonstrate the worship leadership of the Levites. When King Jehoshaphat went to battle with the Moabites and Ammonites, he took members of two Levitical tribes into battle. 1 Chr. 20.22 relates that “when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush” against their enemies. Before the battle, the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Jahaziel and he had encouraged the men not to be afraid, “for the battle is not yours but God’s” (1 Chr. 20.14-15). God helped Judah win the battle without even entering into combat, and music was an essential part of God’s battle strategy.

Another unusual incident in 2 Chr. 23.12-15 concerns the evil queen Athaliah, who introduced Baal-worship. The priest Jehoida, who recognized that she must be dealt with in order for the young Joash to be crowned the rightful king, had her seized and executed. Singers and musicians playing trumpets accompanied the incident. Jehoida immediately established a covenant between himself, the king and the people that they should be dedicated to the Lord (2 Chr. 23.16). The people destroyed the house and altars of Baal and killed Mattan the priest of Baal. Jehoida also stationed watchmen, under the direction of the Levites, to guard the temple. The Levitical ministry was restored according to David’s order, with sacrifices being made, accompanied with rejoicing and singing (2 Chr. 23.18).

However, the people of Judah continued to waiver in their commitment to the Lord. King Ahaz had engaged in idolatry and destroyed some of the temple vessels (2 Chr. 28.22-26), but his son Hezekiah longed to restore true worship among the people (2 Chr. 29.20-36). He

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 45.

stationed the Levites in the temple with various instruments and singers, and they accompanied the sacrifices being made. When the offering was completed, Hezekiah and all the people bowed and worshiped, and he commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord. 2 Chr. 29.30 notes that the Levites “sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped.”

This was a true restoration of worship. All the people who were “of a willing heart” brought burnt offerings (2 Chr. 29.31). The priests could not keep up with the consecrated offerings, so the Levites assisted until other priests could consecrate themselves, “for the Levites were more upright in heart than the priests in consecrating themselves” (2 Chr. 29.34). As a result, “the service of the house of the Lord was restored” (2 Chr. 29.35).

Hezekiah’s reforms continued with the Passover. Some accepted the king’s invitation and humbled themselves in coming to Jerusalem. God’s hand was on Judah “to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord” (2 Chr. 30.12). The people removed the altars and kept the feast. The priests and Levites were ashamed at what had transpired, so they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the temple (2 Chr. 30.15). Since most of the people had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to slaughter a lamb for everyone who was not clean. Hezekiah prayed, “May the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness” (2 Chr. 30.19). God responded by healing the people.

The feast lasted seven days with “great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might to the Lord. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord” (2 Chr. 30.21-22). In this passage, two facets of the Levites’ service stand out above the rest: their enthusiastic renewal of the heart and their skill in playing. Neither aspect was enough to please the Lord;

their hearts needed to be in tune with the Lord, and their skill was necessary to provide accompaniment for an event of this magnitude (the feast lasted for seven days, 2 Chr. 30.22).

Two other key events from Chronicles involve King Josiah. When Josiah found the book of the Law and began temple repairs, he set two Levites over the builders to supervise them. The Levites as a whole, “all who were skillful with instruments of music, were over the burden-bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service, and some of the Levites were scribes and officials and gatekeepers” (2 Chr. 34.12-13). Although Levites were normally associated with ministry and music in the temple, at least in this instance they were placed in a different role.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Josiah knew of their skill in music and was confident it would translate to another kind of work. In any regard, they had a reputation for being skilled in their craft.

A second key event occurred in 2 Chr. 35.1-19, when Josiah kept the Passover. Although the Levites and singers fulfilled their duties as usual, this was no typical Passover. The author notes, “No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 35.18). The Levites fulfilled their duties with excellence and integrity of heart.

### Summary of the Worship Leadership of the Levites

In 1-2 Chronicles we find an inspiring portrait of the Levites, the “worship leaders” who were much more than musicians. They demonstrated godly character in their heart for the Lord, the service to which they were appointed, their reverence for the things of God, and in the use of their music to accompany the destruction of idols. Korah and Uzzah provide two examples of

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<sup>18</sup> This role, however, is in keeping with the wide-ranging responsibilities David had assigned to the Levites in 1 Chr. 25-26. Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 620.

Levites lacking character. The Levites demonstrated skill and competence in composing psalms, theological depth, prophetic ministry, organization, corporate singing and instrumental music, and in other areas when needed. Although it has not been emphasized here, the Levites also participated in battle at times, at times their music was used by God to overcome the enemy.<sup>19</sup>

### **Summary of Defining Marks**

In this chapter we have seen the worship leadership of the Levites through the following:

#### *Character*

- Korah provoked a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.
- The Levite musicians Ethan and Heman were known for their wisdom.
- In 1 Chr. 13 the Levites celebrated with all their might when the ark was returned to Jerusalem; this demonstrates a proper motive.
- Uzzah (who may or may not have been a Levite) and those with him demonstrated carelessness in transporting the ark.
- In other situations the Levites showed great reverence for the things of the Lord.
- David showed a concern for music in worship by appointing a large number of musicians for temple service.
- The Levites' music often accompanied the destruction of idols and altars.
- The Levites are sometimes described as having an upright heart.

#### *Competence*

- Ethan, Heman and Asaph showed skill and depth in their compositions of psalms, both in terms of artistic quality and theological understanding and appreciation.
- The musical skill of individuals and groups is mentioned repeatedly.
- The Levites were also skilled in other areas (i.e. temple repair).
- The Levites used a variety of instruments in addition to singers.
- Certain Levites showed skill in prophesy—a further connection between music and prophesy (not predication, but authoritative words from God).
- The Levites demonstrated organization in their ministry, as well as leadership skills (the text indicates those who were supervisors).
- There is a concern for corporate singing and the leadership necessary to make it effective
- The Levites often accompanied battles with their music

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<sup>19</sup> The Old Testament demonstrates time and again the connection between music and battle, but there is not space here to investigate this intriguing but peripheral issue. Instances of this connection include Num. 10, 31; Josh. 6; Judg. 7; 2 Chr. 13.

## CHAPTER 4

### INCARNATING WORSHIP: JESUS

How does worship leadership in the New Testament differ than that in the Old Testament? To answer this question, we must first understand the difference between the two testaments. Because the word “testament” means “covenant,” the Bible literally consists of the Old and New covenants.<sup>1</sup> Under the old covenant, God’s people obtained forgiveness for their sins through animal sacrifices. By contrast, the new covenant offers forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews explains how “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (Heb. 8.6). Hence, in the New Testament (or new covenant) Christ becomes the focus and the central figure.

This focus on Christ is reflected in the worship of the New Testament. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was the central act of corporate worship. Surrounding the sacrifices were the music, priests and Levites, various offerings and general spectacle of worship. By contrast, in the New Testament Christ is the sacrificial lamb. There is no need for the temple, the elaborate system of priests, or the accoutrements of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Instead, the spectacle of Old Testament worship is replaced by the simplicity and flexibility of its New Testament counterpart.

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<sup>1</sup> The word “testament” “occurs twelve times in the New Testament (Heb. 9:15, etc.) as the rendering of the Gr. *diatheke*, which is twenty times rendered “covenant” in the Authorized Version, and always so in the Revised Version. The Vulgate translates incorrectly by *testamentum*, whence the names “Old” and “New Testament,” by which we now designate the two sections into which the Bible is divided” (italics added). Easton, M.G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897.

In Jesus we find our ultimate worship leader. He is the focal point of the Bible, for the Old Testament points to His arrival, and the New Testament springs from his life and ministry. Kings, priests, Levites, musicians, prophets, preachers, singers: all of these ultimately point to Jesus as the One who was a worshiper himself, who is the center of our worship and who continues to lead in worship.<sup>2</sup> These three facets point to Jesus as our True Worship Leader, God in the flesh who incarnates worship by making it real and visible. This chapter will explore how these facets of Christ's worship leadership shape our character and inspire our competence.

### **Jesus as a Worshiper**

The Gospels consistently show us a picture of Jesus not only as the object of worship, but also as one who continually gave glory and honor to God the Father. Throughout scripture, God consistently reminds his people that he is to be the focus of their worship. His command is clear and direct: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20.3). Jesus echoed the importance of God-directed worship when a scribe asked which commandment was important. Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mk. 12.30; cf. Deut. 6.4). Jesus could say this with authenticity because his teaching flowed from his life. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to bow down and worship him, Jesus replied, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your

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<sup>2</sup> For further help on Jesus' relation to worship as described by the New Testament, see Gerald L. Borchert, "The Lord of Form and Freedom: A New Testament Perspective on Worship," *Review & Expositor*, vol. 80, #1 (Winter 1983), 5-18.

God and him only shall you serve” (Mt. 4.9-10; cf. Deut. 6.13).<sup>3</sup> His worship of the Father was tested to its limit when he submitted to his will in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26.39).

Jesus willingly took part in the worship traditions of the Jewish people. He participated in the worship practices of the Jewish home. He blessed God before breaking bread, he participated in the Passover meal (at the Last Supper), and prayed to the Father.<sup>4</sup> He also paid respect to the Temple traditions. As a young boy we see him willingly participating in the annual Temple visit with his parents. When he became separated from his parents, they found him interacting with the teachers. Amazed, his parents questioned him and he replied, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk. 2.49). Jesus demonstrated his respect for the Temple when he overturned the tables of the money-changers and admonished them, saying, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers” (Mt. 21.12-13).

However, Jesus’ attitude toward the temple was not one of blind loyalty. When his companion Peter was asked whether Jesus would pay the temple tax, Jesus indeed followed through, although his motive was “not to give offense” rather than a desire to support the temple (Mt. 17.24-27). Furthermore, Jesus spoke of true worshipers who would worship “in spirit and truth” rather than in a specific location (Jn. 4.23-24). Indeed, he indicated that the temple would be destroyed (Luke 21.6).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A study of “proskuneo” in Mt. 4.9 indicates that Matthew intentionally contrasts the Magi’s worship of Jesus (2.11), Satan’s request for worship (4.9), and the unmerciful servant who asked for forgiveness (18.26). All three instances include some form of bowing/falling and worshiping.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Farris notes, “It is a reasonable assumption that the religious practices of his people were acceptable to Jesus except for those cases in which the Gospels record an attack against them.” S. C. Farris, “Worship,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 891.

<sup>5</sup> In summarizing Jesus’ attitude toward the temple, Stephen Farris notes, “The Temple is a convenient and appropriate place for worship but, inasmuch as the sacrificial system is no longer valid in the new age inaugurated by the life, death . . . and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is not an essential place for worship of the God of Israel.” *Ibid.*, 892.

The synagogue was also a place of worship that figured prominently into the ministry of Jesus. His custom was to go the synagogue on the Sabbath, and on one occasion he read from the book of Isaiah. Although those who were present were astonished at his word, they drove him out of Nazareth (Lk. 4.16-30). Jesus frequently taught in the synagogues and at times practiced healing and cast out demons in conjunction with his teaching (Mt. 4.23; 9.35; 13.54; Mk. 1.39; Jn. 6.59; 18.20).<sup>6</sup> The house of Peter and Andrew was apparently very close to a synagogue (Mk. 1.29). Jesus healed a paralytic in what appears to be a synagogue (Mk. 2.1-12), and it appears that he was sympathetic to the synagogues in the light of the Jewish elders' request for him to heal a centurion who had built their synagogue (Lk. 7.5). Jesus did not approach the synagogue in an antagonistic manner, but was involved in synagogue life as any other Jewish male would have been. The Gospels do not contain any criticism of Jesus participating in synagogue worship, which would suggest that Jesus approved of the worship that occurred there.<sup>7</sup>

How does the nature of Jesus as a worshiper shape our character? It is a reminder of our need to be humble and submit to the Father. If Jesus, the very Son of God, could be submissive to the Father's will and demonstrate heartfelt worship, there is certainly no room for arrogance or pride. Rather, there must be appropriate humility evident in the life of a worship leader (see Phil. 2.6-11).

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Chilton and Edwin Yamauchi, "Synagogues," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 1150.

<sup>7</sup> A typical synagogue service consisted of three elements: a recitation of the *Shema* (a combination of Deut. 6.4-9, 11.13-21 and Num. 15.37-41), a lengthy prayer known as the *Tephillah*, *Amidah* or *Shemonah Esreh*, and the interpretation or reading of Scripture, possibly chosen from a lectionary. Noting the attitude of Jesus toward synagogue worship, Stephen Farris notes, "The worship of the early church tended to carry on the worship practices of the synagogue. While that affinity is chiefly the result of factors other than Jesus' own precepts and example, it is hard to imagine the early church carrying on a form of worship so reminiscent of the synagogue if Jesus himself had condemned such worship. In this instance the argument from silence is compelling." Farris, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 892. For a brief history of the synagogue, see David K. O'Rourke, "The Synagogue," *The Bible Today*, vol. 22, #4 (July 1984), 227-232.

## Jesus at the Center of Our Worship

Jesus draws us to himself as the only true object of our worship. The New Testament continually presents Jesus as the embodiment of God; he is the incarnate God whom we can touch and see.<sup>8</sup> John testifies at the beginning of his gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God; he only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1.1-3, 14, 18).

Later in the gospel, Jesus equates himself with the Father in no uncertain terms:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14.6-7, 9)

Other writers in the New Testament make the connection between Jesus and the worship that is rightfully his. Matthew includes several accounts of those who worship Jesus (or pretend to), including the Magi (Mt. 2.2, 11), Herod (Mt. 2.8), a leper (Mt. 8.2), a ruler (Mt. 9.18), a Canaanite woman (Mt. 15.25), Mary Magdalene (Mt. 28.9) and the disciples (Mt. 28.11).<sup>9</sup> In many of these cases, the worshiper(s) address Jesus as "Lord." Paul describes him as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," this one in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1.15, 19).

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<sup>8</sup> For a biblical and historical overview of the development of the worship of Christ, see Larry W. Hurtado, "The Origins of the Worship of Christ," *Themelios*, vol. 19, #2 (Jan. 1994), 4-8.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew makes special use of *proskuneo*, a common New Testament word for "worship." The word appears 13 times in his gospel, always in the context of worshipping God or Jesus (except for 18:26, which is the parable of the unmerciful servant). Through the various uses of the word we see Matthew's theme of false worship contrasted with true worship. True worshippers include those who ask for Jesus' help in faith. False worshippers are those who are misguided or have evil intentions (Herod, the unmerciful servant, the mothers of Zebedee's sons).

The worship of Jesus is explicitly expressed in Revelation, where John makes it clear that Jesus is equal with God. Revelation begins with a vision of Christ, “one like a son of man,” who said to John, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1.13, 17-18). Here John introduces a connection between God and Christ that is made evident throughout the book. Richard Bauckham notes the pattern of self-declarations in Revelation, revealing “the remarkable extent to which Revelation identifies Jesus Christ with God.”<sup>10</sup>

God: I am the Alpha and the Omega.	(1.8)
Christ: I am the first and the last,	(1.17)
God: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.	(21.6)
Christ: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. <sup>11</sup>	(22.13)

Rev. 22.13 makes it clear that God and Christ are not two separate deities; they are in fact one. Christ was not a product of God’s creation; he was in fact a *participant* in the process of creation (cf. Rev. 3.14, “the beginning of God’s creation,” indicating not that Christ was a created being, but rather that Christ is just as God, “the beginning and the end,” in Rev. 21.6; 22.13). Paul also identified the role in creation played by Jesus, “through whom are all things and through whom we exist,” “for by him all things were created,” (1 Cor. 8.6; Col. 1.15). The writer of Hebrews attests the same about Jesus, “the heir of all things, through whom he created the world.” We may add to this the testimony of John 1.1-3. These are significant statements

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55. Bauckham also notes, “As we have seen, the two titles, ‘the Alpha and the Omega’, ‘the beginning and the end’, used of God, designate God as eternal in relation to the world. He precedes and originates all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to their eschatological fulfillment. The titles cannot mean anything else when they are used of Christ in 22:13” (p. 55). Furthermore, the title “the first and the last” was not new; it was borrowed from Isaiah’s prophecy, where the title was applied to the Lord (Is. 44.6; 48.12).

about Christ and his equality with God. Because Jesus is the “Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,” he “belongs to the fullness of the eternal being of God.”<sup>12</sup>

The worship of Christ and his identification with creation are connected in the majestic passages of chapters 4-5. In chapter 4, the one “seated on the throne” is the focus of worship, with a heavenly cast of four living creatures and twenty-four elders paying homage to him who is the creator of all things (4.1-11). But in chapter 5, Christ appears on the throne in the form of a Lamb who is slain yet triumphant. As he opens the sealed scroll, the elders and living creatures fall down and worship him, singing a song of worship (5.1-10). Near the end of chapter 5, the worship chorus grows to include a multitude of angels, and ultimately every creature in existence. Together they worship both God and Christ, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5.11-13). The worship of the Lamb naturally progresses into the worship of God. When the Lamb is worshiped, God is worshiped.<sup>13</sup>

The worship of Jesus as God was not simply a theological idea included in Revelation. Although it was probably the last book of the New Testament to be written<sup>14</sup>, the worship of Jesus as God is seen in other letters as well. The doxologies addressed to Christ (Rev. 1.5b-6; 2 Tim. 4.18; 2 Pet. 3.18) demonstrate that both John and the early Christian communities

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>13</sup> This truth is evidenced even through John’s use of grammar. In Rev. 11.15, “our Lord and his Christ” is followed by the singular “he shall reign,” and in 22.3-4 “the throne of God and of the Lamb” is followed by the singular “his servants” and “his face and his name.” Ibid., 60.

<sup>14</sup> The majority of scholars place the date of Revelation around 95 A.D., during the reign of the Domitian. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4; and Carson, D. A., Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 473-6. A minority of scholars place Revelation during the reign of Nero, just before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This would include scholars such as Kenneth L. Gentry, whose *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998) is a seminal work arguing for an early date.

worshiped Jesus not only in theory but in practice. Bauckham notes, “Doxologies, with their confession that glory belongs eternally to the One who is addressed, were a Jewish form of praise to the one God. There could be no clearer way of ascribing to Jesus the worship due to God.”<sup>15</sup>

Worship leaders must prepare and encourage the Church to voice its “doxology” to Christ, both in theory and in practice. Because Christ leads us *to himself* in worship, he is our worship leader. We live and sing our “doxology” to Christ, and follow his example of giving glory, praise and honor where it belongs: to him alone. When we encounter Christ in worship, we cannot come away unchanged. Just as Isaiah encountered God in his holy temple and came away a changed man, we too will be changed when we encounter Christ.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, our worship must focus on glorifying God, who is seated on the throne, and Christ, the victorious Lamb who was slain.

This is a character issue since it involves *who we are* at the very core. But it is also an issue of disciplined leadership. Stories abound of Christian worship services that make no mention of the name of Christ. This should not be so, since Christ is at the center of our worship. Worship leaders need to ensure that those whom they lead have a proper understanding of the place of Jesus, and also ensure to the best of their ability that the musical and artistic elements properly lift up Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, 61. Peter T. O’Brian defines “doxologies” as “short, spontaneous ascriptions of praise to God which frequently appear as concluding formulae to prayers, hymnic expressions . . . and sections of Paul’s letters.” The basic elements of a doxology are: 1) mention of the one to whom praise is given; 2) a word of praise, usually a *doxa* (“glory”); and 3) a temporal description (i.e. “for ever and ever”). “Benediction, Blessing, Doxology, Thanksgiving.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 68.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Foster notes the change that results when we see the Lord in worship: “To see who the Lord is brings us to confession . . . The pervasive sinfulness of human beings becomes evident when contrasted with the radiant holiness of God. Our fickleness becomes apparent once we see God’s faithfulness. To understand his grace is to understand our guilt.” *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 160.

## Jesus as Our Continual Worship Leader

Jesus continues to lead us in worship. How we respond to Jesus in worship is determined by whether we believe Jesus is dead or alive. We do not worship a dead Savior, but a living one! Luke Timothy Johnson, in his book *Living Jesus*, asserts, “There is no middle ground between dead and alive. If Jesus is dead, then his story is completed. If he is alive, then his story continues. . . . For if Jesus is alive, then he is alive not simply as a continuation of his former existence . . . but as the one who has entered into God’s own life and who rules creation as its Lord.”<sup>17</sup> The story, life, mission and ministry of Jesus is alive and well in the hearts of his people today as he leads us in worship. But how does Jesus lead us in worship, and how might his leadership inform our character and competence?

### Jesus is Present with Us through the Holy Spirit

At the conclusion of the Great Commission Jesus tells the disciples, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 18.20). This presence is known to us through the power and work of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16.4b-16). Paul says in Rom. 8.26, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

Worship leaders can be confident that as they lead, Christ is truly present in the assembly through the power of the Holy Spirit. Knowing this can reduce much of the anxiety and pressure of having to give a perfect musical “performance” when we lead worship. This is related to the core of *who we are* as worship leaders; we are not performers, but rather prompters, leaders and first of all worshipers ourselves.

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<sup>17</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 4.

## Jesus is Our Priest and Mediator

Christ himself also intercedes to the Father on our behalf (Rom. 8.34, Heb. 7.25). This is a priestly function whereby Jesus stands before God and, through his shed blood, allows us to stand before God acceptable, blameless and forgiven. Our worship is given to Christ, but we also worship *through* Christ because he is our only way to the Father—that is the meaning of Christ as our “Mediator” or “High Priest.” This is the central theme of the book of Hebrews: Jesus as our High Priest, who is mediator of the new covenant made possible through his shed blood.<sup>18</sup> Jesus is a “high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” the “guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 6.20; 7.22; cf. Heb. 7-10). We have a great hope because of Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice on our behalf. As a result of Christ’s sacrifice, and his role as our High Priest, God has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...” (Eph. 2.6). Today, when we pray (an act of worship itself), we pray “in the name of Christ,” because it is through Christ that we can approach a holy God.<sup>19</sup>

This is related to who we are as worship leaders. Our character is shaped by realizing that effective corporate worship does not depend on producing an emotional thrill ride for our congregations or executing a flawless production. Paul recounts the Lord’s words to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12.9).

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<sup>18</sup> James Torrance notes, “The fact that Jesus Christ is the leader of our worship, the high priest who forgives us our sins and leads us into the holy presence of the Father, is the central theme of the epistle to the Hebrews.” *Worship, Community & the Triune Grace of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Torrance again notes, “In worship we offer ourselves to the Father ‘in the name of Christ’ because he has already in our name made the one true offering to the Father, the offering by which he has sanctified for all time those who come to God by him . . . and because he ever lives to intercede for us in our name. The covenant between God and humanity is concentrated in his person.” *Ibid.*, 50. For further reflection on Jesus as our High Priest, see Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel’s Worship*, The Gospel According to the Old Testament Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 151-59; and David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 228-34.

When we allow our perfectionist tendencies to overtake our dependence on Jesus, we stand in danger of believing that true worship depends on us instead of Jesus.

### Jesus is Our Teacher

The only significant teaching from Jesus about worship occurs in John 4. Ironically, the context of his teaching occurs in a conversation with a disreputable Samaritan woman. (We might naturally be inclined to think such an important topic would be confined to his inner circle or more learned men, but once again we find Jesus turning social conventions upside down.)<sup>20</sup> Here Jesus teaches that worship is not confined to a specific place, but rather, that God is primarily interested in “true worshipers” who “worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4.23-24).

Space here does not permit a detailed reflection on John 4. Rather, we should note several applications for worship leaders related to character and competence. In terms of character, we must heed Jesus’ teaching and worship in spirit and truth ourselves. We also should reflect the spirit of Christ and engage anyone wanting to speak about worship, especially “outsiders.” We may miss a wonderful teaching opportunity if we do not pay attention to the Spirit’s leading.

Related to our competence, we need to relate Jesus’ teaching to others. Worship leaders not only have a responsibility to lead in music, but to lead in teaching about worship (as gifts and opportunities allow). We also should ensure, as much as possible, that the worship services we design and lead reflect both spirit *and* truth. This refers to worship empowered by the Holy Spirit but also informed by the truth of God, provided to us by Jesus Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, one need only look at Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus to see his association with those outside of normal social conventions (Mt. 1.1-16). One would expect the long-awaited “Messiah” to boast a more sanitized pedigree. However, one of the surprising aspects of Jesus’ geneology is the inclusion of women who have some type of sexual irregularity: Tamar (raped by her half-brother Amnon), Rahab (a prostitute who lied), Bathsheba (not referred to by name, but as the “wife of Uriah,” with whom David committed adultery), and Mary (a virgin who conceived a child).

## Jesus is Our Lead Singer

As our High Priest, Mediator and Teacher, Jesus is also present among us and continues to direct our worship as our Lead Singer. Kidd relates Jesus' singing to a "fifth voice" which is sometimes heard when the harmonies of a barbershop quartet blend in such a way as to produce the illusion of another, unseen singer. He states that this is "a divine whisper of something that is absolutely true of our singing when we gather in worship. For the Bible says that in the church Jesus is singing hymns to the Father (Heb. 2.12) and that, in fact, he is our Worship Leader..."<sup>21</sup>

Paul recognized that Jesus is not only a Savior, but a *Singing* Savior. He places the words of David on Jesus' lips: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name" (Rom. 15.9; cf. 2 Sam. 22.50; Ps. 18.49). Through Christ we offer up a "sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13.15). Even the prophet Zephaniah describes God in the midst of his people, the one who "will exult over you with loud singing" (Zeph. 3.17).<sup>22</sup>

This compels us to pursue excellence in our worship leadership. This is not the same thing as perfection in music. If Christ is truly singing with us and through us—and if we are singing with and through Christ—we want his voice to be heard far above ours. Are all the elements of our corporate worship worthy of Jesus' voice? In our singing, instrumental music, poetry, art, drama, words—is Jesus' voice heard above all of our voices, or is he sometimes drowned out in the cacophonous sounds of *our* voices, *our* egos, *our* songs? Our pursuit of excellence means that we try to "get out of the way" as much as possible. It also means that in a practical sense we eliminate as many distractions as possible in worship. This is not a call to cancel or reduce human leadership, but rather a call for a certain kind of leadership—the kind

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<sup>21</sup> Kidd, 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> For a further exploration of the concept of Jesus as a Lead Singer, see Appendix E: "Jesus, Our Singing Savior."

that is disciplined and humble enough to allow Christ's voice to be heard far above ours. After all, we are simply members on his worship team.

### **Summary of Jesus' Worship Leadership**

Jesus Christ is the one true worship leader of his Church.<sup>23</sup> His song is our song, and we sing our praises through him and with him.<sup>24</sup> This is not to suggest that human leadership is unimportant. Rather, we recognize that the primary leader of worship is Jesus Christ. We follow *his* direction, *his* leadership, *his* instruction, and most important, we sing *his* song. Richard Foster observes,

Genuine worship has only one leader, Jesus Christ. When I speak of Jesus as the Leader of worship, I mean, first of all, that he is alive and present among his people. His voice can be heard in their hearts and his presence known. We not only read about him in Scripture, we can know him by revelation. He wants to teach us, guide us, rebuke us, comfort us.<sup>25</sup>

We must focus on the presence of Christ in our worship. This is not mere "church talk," but a true reality because Christ is present and living among us. If worship leadership is so important, why does the New Testament have so little to say about what actually transpired in the early church's community worship? It is because in the early church Christ was seen as preeminent, real, living. He was *there*.<sup>26</sup>

And he is *here* also. Jesus is our worship leader because he was a worshiper himself who showed humility and submission to God. He is our worship leader because he is theologically

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<sup>23</sup> For a helpful article on Jesus' role as our worship leader, see Ron Man, "Jesus Our Worship Leader: The Mediating Work of the Son in Worship," *Reformation & Revival*, vol. 9, #2 (Spring 2000), 31-43.

<sup>24</sup> Reggie Kidd notes, "God has written his Son into the story line as lead Singer. It's as though we were the congregation in a cosmic call-and-response spiritual, where the Leader's voice lays out a line, and we the congregation sing it back. This means we sing so we can sing with Jesus." *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>26</sup> Leonard, 171.

the focus of our worship. He leads us to the Father, for there is no way to the Father except through him (Jn. 14.6). Finally, Jesus is our worship leader because he continually leads us in worship by his mediation, teaching and singing.

### **Summary of Defining Marks**

As we explore the worship leadership of Christ and its relation to our character and competence, we should note several observations. Any consideration of Jesus' worship leadership will involve his earthly ministry as well as his present spiritual ministry among the Church.

#### *Character*

- Jesus demonstrated unwavering devotion to the worship of God through his words and life, even in the face of temptation.
- Jesus showed appropriate humility and submission in his worship of the Father.
- Through both Jesus himself and various New Testament passages, it is evident that Christian worship should be directed toward Jesus. This points to the character of Jesus: *who he is*.
- Christ is now present among his people when they gather together in the assembly.

#### *Competence*

- In conjunction with local synagogues (a place of worship), Jesus practiced various forms of public ministry (teaching, healing, casting out demons).
- In John 4 Jesus communicated his most significant teaching about worship: the Father seeks worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth.
- Though the gift of the Spirit, Jesus continually leads us in worship directed to himself and God the Father.
- Jesus also continually intercedes for us as our Mediator. He is the True Worship Leader who makes it possible for us to approach the Father.

## CHAPTER 5

### ADVANCING WORSHIP: PAUL

Second only to Jesus, Paul is the most influential figure in the New Testament. As the primary pastor, teacher, missionary and evangelist of the early church, his influence extended well into matters of corporate worship. He not only set an example by his own life, but made contributions to the worship life of the early church, as this chapter will demonstrate. The cause of the church, and therefore the value of corporate worship, was advanced due to his influence. There is much more in the New Testament that holds application for worship leadership, but space here only permits a brief examination of Paul's contribution to worship.<sup>1</sup>

Paul's life as a Pharisee was one far removed from that of an influential leader in the new community of Christian believers. He was, in fact, a "persecutor of the church" (Phil. 3.6) who antagonized Christians. Yet on the road to Damascus he encountered Jesus and was transformed into a new man, even changing his name.<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce notes that "Paul found himself instantaneously compelled by what he saw and heard to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one, was alive after his passion, vindicated and exalted by God, and was now conscripting him into his service."<sup>3</sup> Paul responded to God's call and was forever changed.

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<sup>1</sup> The two other primary areas of exploration related to worship leadership in the New Testament would seem to be worship leadership in the Christian assembly, and worship leadership in Revelation. Consult the Bibliography for selected sources exploring these two areas.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 13.9 seems to be the point at which Saul's name changed to Paul, although the text does not give a specific reason for the change.

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 75.

The Lord indeed used Paul in his service in a powerful way, one of which was in the realm of worship leadership. Although Paul was not primarily a worship leader in the strictest sense (one who leads congregational singing), he is arguably the most important worship leader in the life of the early church (second, of course, to Christ). His importance as a worship leader can be noted in several functions of his ministry, each of which informs the character and competence needed in worship leaders today.

### **Paul as a Theologian**

Paul led worship theologically by directing his worship and ministry to the glory of Christ. The primary theme of Paul's message and ministry was the person and work of Christ and its importance to the redemption of humanity.<sup>4</sup> Paul's simple proclamation of "Jesus as Lord" (Rom. 10.9) carried a significant weight in the first century, designating that Jesus was equal to God.<sup>5</sup> Time and again Paul brought to mind the divinity and Lordship of Christ the Savior (Acts 13.23; Rom. 9.5; 2 Thess. 1.12; Tit. 1.4; 2.13; Eph. 5.23; Phil. 3.20; 2 Tim. 1.10). As the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1.15), Jesus is the focal point for Christian worship, and Paul's message and ministry reflected this focus. As a key leader in the early church, he directed the church's worship *theologically*, if not musically. Worship leaders can learn from Paul's unflinching ministry focus on the persona and work of Christ.

### **Paul as a Worshiper**

Paul led worship personally by expressing his song of praise to God. The only narrative account of Paul singing occurs in Acts 16, where we find him with Silas in prison as a result of

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Longnecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 95.

<sup>5</sup> Longnecker observes, "While 'Lord' ranged in meaning in the first century from simple respect ('Sir') to reverential worship, it was commonly employed in the Greek Old Testament and the intertestamental writings as a designation for God. And it appears frequently in the New Testament as well." *Ibid.*, 97.

casting a spirit out of a slave girl. “About midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken” (Acts 16.25-26). Gareth Reese notes that the Greek express not one, but two acts; Paul and Silas were singing *while* they were praying.<sup>6</sup> Although it is unclear whether they were singing the psalms or perhaps a new composition directed to Christ, their intention was to glorify God with their voice.

A few hundred years later, Augustine of Hippo would reflect, “Whoever sings, prays twice.”<sup>7</sup> The text notes that the prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas (a better translation is that they “were listening eagerly”<sup>8</sup>), further noting the sincerity and power of their song of worship. As they were singing, an earthquake arose and the doors were thrown open, allowing them the opportunity to share the gospel with the jailer. The example of Paul and Silas speaks to the need for an authentic life of praise and worship (Rom. 12.1), in spite of the circumstance. Paul’s teaching and leadership carried the weight of authenticity because he lived what he taught.

### **Paul’s Use of Hymns**

Paul led worship theologically and artistically by expressing and encouraging worship through the use of hymns in his letters. Paul’s attitude of worship and praise found its way into many of his letters, where he often included expressions of praise in the form of hymns and poems. Here we find Paul acting as a worship leader from a distance, prompting and encouraging the church to worship. To understand his unique contribution as a worship leader, it is helpful to survey the primary hymns found in his letters.

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<sup>6</sup> Gareth Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1976), 586.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Reese, 587.

## Philippians 2.6-11

This hymn comes in the middle of his “letter of joy” (Phil. 4.4), which ironically, was written from a prison cell.<sup>9</sup> Paul meditates on the servanthood and humility of Christ, who became “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” In the final verses he shows the results of Christ’s obedience:

Therefore God has highly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,  
So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Scholars are in general agreement that the hymn is probably not original with Paul, but that he simply made use of it in his letter. However, his use of it here “may stand at the forefront of christological hymns of the Christian church, providing a template for Christian theology and hymn writing that reflects a ternary pattern: Christ’s preexistence, his incarnation and death on a cross, and his resurrection and ultimate exaltation.”<sup>10</sup> The content of the hymn certainly leaves no room for doubt concerning Paul’s high view of Christ.

## Colossians 1.15-20

The occasion for Paul’s letter to the Colossians is his refutation of false teachers. In doing so, he places the focus immediately on the supremacy of Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

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<sup>9</sup> Paul’s prison epistles include Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and 2 Timothy.

<sup>10</sup> Wendy J. Porter, “Music.” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 235.

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

This is considered to be a traditional hymn already in existence when used by Paul. It is a deeply theological statement declaring the preeminence of Christ.

#### Ephesians 5.14

The first half of Ephesians centers on the grace of Christ (“by grace you have been saved through faith,” Eph. 2.8), and the second half outlines the practical obedience that should be the result of grace lived out in the Christian life. Paul gives instruction to “walk as children of light”; we are to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. . . when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light” (Eph. 5.8, 11, 13). He introduces the hymn fragment: “Therefore it says,”

Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.

The purpose of the hymn could be seen as evangelistic, and may have been used in the context of baptism.<sup>11</sup> Whether Paul composed the short hymn or borrowed it from an existing source, it seems to have directly borrowed themes from Is. 26.19 and 60.1, 2.<sup>12</sup>

#### 1 Timothy 3.16

Timothy had been sent to Ephesus to lead the church there, and Paul’s first letter to him blends practical encouragement in pastoral ministry with instruction in theological content. In

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<sup>11</sup> Wendy J. Porter, “Creeds and Hymns.” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 234-35.

<sup>12</sup> Is. 26.19 reads, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” Is. 60.1, 2 reads, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”

3.1-13 Paul gives instruction about the qualifications for elders and deacons who are leaders in the household of God, “which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth”

(3.15). Paul follows with a hymn concerning the “mystery of godliness”:

He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.

This is a compact statement, using only six words and eighteen lines in the Greek. Each of the verbs is in the passive voice, further emphasizing that Christ is the subject. Furthermore, its parallel poetic form and passive verbs (which emphasize Christ as the subject) suggest that it was used in a musical or liturgical setting.<sup>13</sup> As with the previous hymns discussed, scholars generally agree that Paul borrowed the hymn from another source. Paul’s introductory phrase, “Great indeed, we confess...” would seem to support this.

These hymns made a difference in the worship life of the church. They communicate a high Christology in the church and may have been used in other settings prior to Paul’s use of them in his letters. Concerning the Christological nature of Phil. 2.6-11, Col. 1.15-20 and 1 Tim. 3.16, Ralph P. Martin observes, “Hymnology and Christology thus merge in praise of the one Lord . . . soon to be hailed after the close of the NT canon as worthy of hymns ‘as to God’ (Pliny’s report of Bithynian Christians’ worship, A.D. 112).”<sup>14</sup> Here Paul mingles high

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<sup>13</sup> Porter, “Creeds and Hymns,” 235.

<sup>14</sup> Ralph Martin, “Hymns, Hymn Fragments, Songs, Spiritual Songs.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993) 422. He makes special note of the content of these hymns: “[Christ’s] pre-existence and pretemporal activity in creation are made the frontpiece of the hymns, and from the divine order in which he eternally exists, he ‘comes down’ as the incarnate one in an epiphany. . . The hymns are essentially soteriological in their purpose, and set forth the person of Christ in relation to his world as reconciler and world ruler.” Ibid.

Christology with high hymnology. Theological content and artistic form come together in a creative mix that speaks to the mind as well as the heart. Similarly, Grant Osborne observes,

In the New Testament, especially in the Epistles, the hymns demonstrate the highest level of theological expression. The creeds and hymns utilize poetic format to present cardinal New Testament doctrines, especially christological truth, often centering upon the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. . . These hymns provide excellent evidence for the possibility of blending the poetic format and the highest possible theological message in biblical times.<sup>15</sup>

Paul's use of hymns (whether he borrowed or composed them) demonstrates a deep concern for theology. But it is not a theology devoid of emotion or beauty. Much like the psalmists of ancient Israel, Paul used the vehicle of poetry and art to teach theology.

### **Paul as a Pastor & Teacher**

Paul led worship pastorally by giving instructions concerning corporate worship. Throughout his letters Paul gave various instructions on corporate worship according to the context of the situation. Below is a brief summary of Paul's more explicit teachings on worship:

#### **Order in Worship**

Paul's main concern with worship, at least in relation to the Corinthians, was for order in their worship gatherings. These Gentile believers were probably unaccustomed to order in worship, in contrast to their Jewish counterparts who had participated in synagogue worship. One of the areas of confusion was the Lord's Supper. There were divisions among the group, and people were disregarding one another. Some were going hungry or getting drunk (1 Cor. 11.17-22). They were in danger of judgment from the Lord (1 Cor. 11.27-33).

Paul tells them in 1 Cor. 14.40 that "all things should be done decently and in order."

This applied especially to the gifts of prophecy and tongues, which were being exercised in

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<sup>15</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 186.

anything but an orderly fashion. His basic instruction was that tongues and prophecy should be used in an organized manner, because “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14.33). He did not instruct them to stop using these gifts. Robert Webber notes, “The issue of order, with respect to both the Lord’s Supper and the assembly where tongues and prophecy were practiced, had to do with recognizing that Christian worship was a corporate, not just an individual, action.”<sup>16</sup> This is evident especially when we examine the context of the latter chapters of 1 Corinthians. Chapter 11 deals with the Lord’s Supper, chapter 12 with spiritual gifts and the body of Christ, chapter 13 with love, and chapter 14 with corporate worship. These are all related to Paul’s teaching that we are members of one body and should prefer one another over ourselves.

### The Content of Worship

Paul was concerned about the practices of worship as well as what was being taught. He reminded them of the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor. 11.23-26, and was concerned with the content of their worship gatherings, that everything should be done for the purpose of building up Christ’s body. “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Cor. 14.26).

### Music in the Church

One of Paul’s most significant instructions regarding worship is found in Eph. 5.19 and Col. 3.16, where he instructs Christians to use “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” in worship. There has been much debate about the meaning of these terms. Wendy Porter notes that “it remains unknown exactly what musical form may have been meant by any of these three terms,

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<sup>16</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 47.

if any. . .”<sup>17</sup> Other scholars disagree.<sup>18</sup> The point stands, however, that Paul is encouraging a variety of music forms and styles in the church.

Underneath the meanings of the specific terms, however, lies Paul’s intention. The context of both of these passages emphasizes Christian character, particularly as it relates to our relationships with fellow believers (Eph. 5.15-21 and Col. 3.12-17). Donald Thiessen notes,

The music inspired by the Holy Spirit goes in two directions: horizontally to one another in fellowship and vertically by a melody in the heart to the Lord. In all of our worship and fellowship we need to keep these two directions in mind. To think one can fellowship with the Lord when one can’t fellowship with the brothers and sisters or to think one can have meaningful fellowship with believers when things are not right between one and the Lord is to have a wrong conception of the totality of the relational life of a growing, maturing Christian. A part of this relationship is expressed in music.<sup>19</sup>

### Women in Worship

Paul gives specific instructions regarding women in worship in 1 Tim. 2.9-15 and 1 Cor. 14.33-35. These passages have been passionately debated. The primary issue is whether Paul’s instructions here are bound by culture or applicable to all women for all time. We must keep in mind that in his various ministry endeavors, Paul worked alongside both men and women. (Phoebe, Prisca and Mary are mentioned by name in Rom. 16.1-6.) Regardless of one’s viewpoint, we must examine his instructions on women in the church because they stand

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<sup>17</sup> Porter, “Music,” 713.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Porter cites E. Wellesz, who proposed that the meaning of these terms was specific. He defined psalmody as “the cantillation of the Jewish psalms and of the canticles and doxologies modelled on them”; hymns as “songs of praise of a syllabic type, i.e. each syllable is sung to one or two notes of melody”; and spiritual songs as “Alleluias and other chants of a jubilant or ecstatic character, richly ornamented.” E. Wellesz, “Early Christian Music.” *Early Medieval Music up to 1300*. Ed. A Hughes. The New Oxford History of Music, Vol. 2. Rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 1-13. Cited in Wendy J. Porter, “Music,” 712. For a further investigation of Col. 3.16, see David F. Detwiler, “Church Music and Colossians 3.16,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 158, #631 (July-Sep. 2001), 347-69.

<sup>19</sup> Thiessen, 121.

alongside other commands; each person should examine the evidence and come to his or her own thoughtful conclusions.

### A Life of Worship

In Romans 1-11 Paul elaborates on the mercy of God poured out for all people. In light of this mercy, Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12.1). Paul’s words contain a strong Old Testament connection, for he speaks of offering our *bodies* (our total person) as a *living* (continual) sacrifice. The word translated “worship” here is *latreuo*, a word found 21 times in the New Testament, meaning “service” or “worship.”<sup>20</sup> The NASB translates the concept most accurately as “spiritual service of worship.” This communicates well the intention behind its Old Testament counterpart, *abad*, meaning “work” or “service” that is given to God (Ex. 5.18; Num. 8.25). The core idea of the word as it relates to worship is to obey a set of divine commands and submit to the will of the deity (Deut. 10.12, Josh. 22.5). In Rom. 12.1 Paul expresses the idea that our whole lives are a continual act of worship to God.

### Other Teachings on Worship

In various contexts Paul gave instruction on other areas related to corporate worship. These are not necessarily less important, but they seem to have been given less attention by Paul in his letters. These topics would include: financial giving (1 Cor. 16.1-3; 2 Cor. 9.6-9), worship on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16.2), celebration of Pentecost (1 Cor. 16.8), greeting one

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<sup>20</sup> All of these occurrences are in religious contexts where the service is offered to God, not to people; cf. Lk. 2.37; Acts 26.7; Phil. 3.3. The noun occurs. The noun form *latreia* is used five times in the New Testament, and three of these refer to sacrificial ministry.

another with a holy kiss (1 Cor. 16.20), church discipline (1 Cor. 5.1-13; 16.22), and baptism (Rom. 6.1-4; Col. 2.12).<sup>21</sup>

Through all of his various teachings Paul demonstrated a great concern over Christian worship. He cared about the content of worship and what people believed. He wanted to see the focus of worship being placed upon Christ. He wanted to see order take the place of chaos in Christian gatherings. Paul saw singing as an important element in the assembly. None of these would matter if Paul had not lived a life that gave credence to his teaching.

### **Summary of Paul's Worship Leadership**

As a teacher, missionary, evangelist, pastor, apostle, possible composer, and worshiper, Paul left an immeasurable mark on the early church. His influence extended to corporate worship as he traveled, gave instructions to local congregations through his letters, and modeled a life of sincere worship. In his letters and hymns Paul set forth a deep theological concern over the content of worship. His goal was that Christ be glorified in everything. Paul gave instructions regarding proper behavior in worship, singing in the church, women in worship, and a variety of other subjects. Throughout his letters Paul demonstrated a grave concern for right relationships among Christians, implying that our worship gatherings involve more than “me and God”—they involve others as well. Because Paul responded in obedience to the dramatic call of God, he became a powerful tool for the advancement of God's kingdom, and a significant model for worship leadership.

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<sup>21</sup> Webber, *Worship Old & New*, 46-47.

## Summary of Defining Marks

We can draw the following conclusions from Paul's leadership and teaching related to worship:

### *Character*

- Paul responded to the call of God to ministry in a dramatic conversion experience.
- In difficult circumstances Paul and Silas sang praises to God (Acts 16). This is the only time Paul is recorded as singing, but many more times he endured hardship with an attitude of joy.
- In his teaching Paul is concerned about relationships among Christians.
- Paul demonstrated the need for proper Christian character and behavior in Christian assemblies (see 1 Cor. 11, 14).

### *Competence*

- Paul directed the church's worship theologically, focusing on the person and work of Christ. He demonstrated a concern over the content of worship.
- Through his use of hymns and hymn fragments Paul combined deep theology with creative composition. He brought together the "best of both worlds" in order to touch both the heart and the mind.
- Paul functioned as an effective teacher, giving a significant amount of instruction for the church related to worship.
- Paul was concerned for order in Christian worship.
- Paul communicated the value of congregational song through his instructions to the church and in his personal life.

## CHAPTER 6

### APPLYING WORSHIP: THE DEFINING MARKS FOR TODAY’S WORSHIP LEADERS

At the conclusion of *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, John Witvliet reflects on the value and potential danger of historical inquiry:

. . . these essays calls us to avoid the use of history as propaganda in current disputes. Liturgical history . . . is often used as a warrant for present practice—and for both progressive and conservative causes. . . . Often people see in history what they want to see. Often the use of historical examples in discussion about worship does not feature the kind of humility that asks, “What can we learn from models and ways of understanding very different from our own?”<sup>1</sup>

Witvliet accurately identifies one of the dangers of a study such as this one: it is tempting to “see what we want to see” in the biblical story of worship leadership, and only make application that supports conclusions we already hold. Hopefully that is not the case here. In this study we have tried to give a brief but honest overview of the primary worship leaders in the Bible. This chapter is a humble attempt at summarizing and organizing the “defining marks” from the previous chapters. We will also make application for worship leaders today.

Each of the “defining marks” below is derived from the larger categories of godly character and humble competence, and is written in the active voice as a reminder that our learning and development is an ongoing process. None of us possesses all of these qualities in full measure, but just as an archer must first see the target before pointing his bow and arrow, we must see the “big picture” if we hope to maximize our potential for effective worship leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Maag and John D. Witvliet, eds., *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Change and Continuity in Religious Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 340.

## The Defining Marks of Godly Character

### 1. Responding to God's Call

In several of the chapters we have seen the clear call of God in the life of a worship leader. Moses, David and Paul were called and chosen by God for a particular task. Jesus is not in the same category, since he is *Jesus*, but we can be certain that he understood and fulfilled his mission in life.<sup>2</sup>

Not every leader (much less every worship leader) will experience a dramatic call experience from God. But certainly there is an element in our worship leadership of responding to the invitation to lead, to serve, to minister. Many people serve in ministry and leadership without ever having a strong sense of call; rather, they have simply responded to a need with their gifts, and the result is effective ministry. That in itself may be evidence that God has called them to serve in that place, for the call does not always come dramatically.

God's call to ministry is a very personal and complex issue.<sup>3</sup> Many people are only able to discern God's true call on their life when they have gained ministry experience and have "tested the waters." The point is that a worship leader should be serving in that capacity because of some kind of conviction that God wants them there. This has to do with a person's *motive*: are they serving out of a need to perform or be recognized, or a desire to fulfill God's will?

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<sup>2</sup> Many other individuals in the Bible were called by God/Jesus and responded in obedience. Examples include Noah (Gen. 6), Abraham (Gen. 12), Joshua (Josh. 1), Samuel (1 Sam. 3), John the Baptist (Mark 1), Stephen (Acts 6) and the disciples (Mt. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Carlo Carretto reflects, "God's call is mysterious; it comes in the darkness of faith. It is so fine, so subtle, that it is only with the deepest silence within us that we can hear it...And yet nothing is so decisive and overpowering for a man or woman on this earth, nothing surer or stronger. . . . This call is uninterrupted: God is always calling us! But there are distinctive moments in this call of his, moments which leave a permanent mark on us—moments which we never forget." Carlo Carretto, *Letters from the Desert* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1972, xv, quoted in Ben Campbell Johnson, *Hearing God's Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 11.

How might a person know if they are called? Six elements of a call to ministry seem to be common: 1) A restlessness with one's present responsibilities; 2) An inner pull from God toward something specific; 3) Confirmation from family, friends and others within the Christian community; 4) God speaking and leading through Scripture; 5) An invitation by others to share in a ministry; 6) Giftedness that matches the call.

God never explicitly demands in Scripture that one must have a dramatic call experience in order to be effective in leadership or ministry. Nevertheless, there are abundant examples of those in the Bible who did experience a call from God. There were others who faithfully served in response to a need. Both of those scenarios truly represent God's call, and the worship leader ought to be able to discern at some early point in his or her leadership that they are serving where God wants them to be.<sup>4</sup> Richard Foster notes the importance of God's hand in setting apart worship leaders for a vital ministry:

“With all this lofty talk about Christ as the Leader of worship you might conclude that human leadership is unimportant. Nothing could be further from the truth. If God does not raise up inspired leaders who can guide people into worship with authority and compassion, then the experience of worship will be nearly impossible. This is the reason for the leadership gifts of the Spirit (Eph. 4.11). Worship leaders who are called out by God must not be shy about their leadership. People need to be led *into* worship: from the Outer Court to the Inner Court and finally into the Holy of Holies. God anoints leaders to bring people through this progression into worship.”<sup>5</sup>

## *2. Developing a Genuine Heart for God*

Throughout the Old Testament we see a clear picture of worship leaders who continually show a true heart for God. The patriarchs, elders and other family group leaders lived out worship in their daily lives by making altars and sacrifices. Moses showed his faith in God by

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<sup>4</sup> For further reading, see Alice R. Cullinan, *Sorting It Out: Discerning God's Call to Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999); Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Johnson, *Hearing God's Call*.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, 166.

being his instrument to lead the Israelites out of bondage, although his brother Aaron led the people into idolatry. David is surely the supreme example of one whose heart was devoted to the Lord, for he was a “man after God’s own heart.” Time and again we see how the kings of Israel influenced their people for good or for ill, depending on the state of their relationship with God. As the king went, so the nation. The Levites, though not perfect, demonstrated an “upright heart” by their resistance to idolatry (at the scene of the golden calf), their worship leadership in the tabernacle and temple, and their contribution of psalms.

In Jesus we see a heart dedicated to loving, serving and obeying his Father. He gained strength and solace from his time with the Father, and participated in worship although he was God incarnate. In Paul’s life we also witness a heart that is joyful, even in the face of hardship. These individuals were worshipers before they led others in worship.

God’s primary requirement for effective ministry is not talent, charisma or appearance, but a heart of authentic worship. A worship leader may be outwardly effective and have short-term success, but true success comes out of the “overflow” of a worship leader’s life. This is our first priority, as Richard Foster notes: “The divine priority is worship first, service second. Our lives are to be punctuated with praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. Service flows out of worship. Service as a substitute for worship is idolatry. Activity is the enemy of adoration.”<sup>6</sup>

Reggie McNeal makes the following keen observation:

In recent years, personal charisma, motivational prowess, and marketing savvy rank near the top of those qualities that are rewarded by large followings in ministry. But God defines the search parameters of what he is looking for. Future ministry models will

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<sup>6</sup> Foster, 161. He goes on to say, “Punctuate every moment with inward whisperings of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Have personal times of inner worship and confession and Bible study and attentiveness to Christ, your Present Teacher. All this will heighten your expectancy in public worship because the gathered experience of worship just becomes a continuation and an intensification of what you have been trying to do all week long” (Foster, 171).

increasingly return to a renewed emphasis on models that value heart integrity and spiritual presence for those who lead spiritual communities.<sup>7</sup>

This is nowhere more true than in worship and music ministry, which lifts people to celebrity status, even in Christian circles. While recognition and fame are not evil in themselves what God is truly seeking are men and women who are pursuing his own heart.

### *3. Practicing Authentic Spiritual Leadership*

Henry & Richard Blackaby define spiritual leadership as “moving people on to God’s agenda.”<sup>8</sup> Authenticity refers to something that is real, genuine or sincere. Therefore, authentic spiritual leadership means taking part in God’s agenda, for God’s purposes, with no pretense or agenda of our own. This deals with our motives and who we are as worship leaders.

The Old Testament shows us authentic spiritual leaders who directed worship. The first example is the Patriarchs, who established homes that gave glory and honor to God. Through their obedience and worship their families (for the most part) followed God’s purposes and agenda. The first priority of a leader is to establish their *home* as a place of worship. Their own household must be in order before they attempt to lead in *God’s* house (1 Tim. 3.4-5).

Further into the Old Testament, we see Moses confronting idolatry. We also see the negative example of Korah, the Levite who influenced others for his own purposes (and paid a dear price!). We witness the Levites who not only excelled at their craft, but practiced spiritual leadership through their music (for example, by using music to accompany the destruction of idols, and celebrating with music when the ark returned to Jerusalem). The motive of the Levites was to give God the glory, not to exalt themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> McNeal, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Henry & Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People On to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001).

Authentic spiritual leadership involves our relationships with God *and* with others. Paul gives a great deal of instruction about our need for healthy relationship, as the context of his instruction on church music demonstrates (Eph. 5.16, Col. 3.19). God-honoring worship and healthy relationships are deeply related, as Paul shows in his instructions for Christian assemblies (1 Cor. 11, 14). These proper behavior and attitudes should be evident in the life of the worship leader, who is a model of godly leadership and submission to Christ (Rom. 12.1).

What does spiritual worship leadership look like? Spiritual leadership is not primarily about specific skills or a set of talents. Rather, it concerns the state of a worship leader’s heart and their ability to influence others because of their close relationship with God. Music and worship ministry is a field in which one can easily “coast by” on talent alone. But the power of a spiritual leader lies in *who they are* in relation to God and others; the power of an *empty leader* comes from their talent, charisma or other outside source. Perhaps an effective way to measure one’s spiritual leadership is to ask: What would happen if I suddenly lost my musical or artistic talent? Would I continue to have influence because of who I am, or would I soon be ineffective because my power and influence are rooted in my gifts rather than my character?

#### *4. Modeling a Life of Integrity & Holiness*

Os Guinness defines character as “the essential ‘stuff’ a person is made of, the inner reality and quality in which thoughts, speech, decision, behavior, and relations are rooted.”<sup>9</sup> He goes on to say that the ancient Hebrews viewed character “as essentially moral. ‘Righteousness’ in the Bible is not just a matter of what we do and is certainly not just what we say.

Righteousness is a matter of the heart. It is about who we are at the core of our being —before

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<sup>9</sup> Os Guinness, ed., *Character Counts: Leadership Qualities in Washington, Wilberforce, Lincoln, and Solzhenitsyn* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 12.

God.”<sup>10</sup> David was perhaps the greatest example of the Old Testament who modeled integrity of heart; even in his darkest times of sin he approached God with a penitent heart. The priests, as mediators between God and his people, were called to be holy and distinct, with an attitude of service (although they, like David, did not always live up to this ideal).

Worship leaders today should be models of holiness and character. Why is this so important? First, because our identity as Christians means that we are a people called to be holy (1 Pet. 1.13-16). Second, as leaders we are called to be models to those whom we lead. Third, and perhaps most importantly, our lives should not distract from our ministry of leading people in worship of a holy God. None of us is perfect, but we should strive for holiness and integrity so that our life as well as our music will honor God when we lead worship.

#### *5. Serving with a Humble Attitude*

Paul writes in Phil. 2.3-4: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” We see humility in the life of Jesus, particularly in Paul’s grand hymn to Christ in Phil. 2.6-11. The humility in the life of Christ was, and still is, a revolutionary idea. Referencing Jesus’ words on servanthood (Mark 10.43-44), J. Oswald Sanders notes,

Jesus was a revolutionary, not in the guerilla warfare sense, but in the His teaching on leadership. The term *servant* speaks everywhere of low prestige, low respect, low honor. Most people are not attracted to such a low-value role. When Jesus used the term, however, it was a synonym for greatness. And that was a revolutionary idea.<sup>11</sup>

If Jesus had enough character to express humility and servanthood, surely worship leaders can follow suit. Humility means that we have a proper assessment of our gifts and role within the larger picture of worship. We think neither more highly nor more lowly of ourselves

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>11</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 3.

than necessary. When we think more highly of ourselves than is needed, we develop a large ego and become arrogant, even if only inwardly. Our over-developed ego can express itself in many ways in worship leadership: by not including others in song selection, decision-making and other processes; by not equipping or allowing other worship leaders to have the platform; even by whom we select to lead worship in our absence.

We can be humble because true worship does not depend on us. If Christ is truly present in our assembly, we need to feel no pressure to create a false sense of excitement or agitate people into an emotional frenzy. We do not need to perform.

We should understand who we are as worship leaders, but more importantly, we need to understand *who we are not*.<sup>12</sup> We are not the mediator through which people approach God, and our music is not the emotional gateway to an experiential encounter with God. Christ is the only mediator. The real source of power is the Holy Spirit, not our music. We should not put undue confidence in our own abilities, for we are simply the prompters and facilitators. Christ is the True Worship Leader who makes it possible for us to approach the Father in spirit and in truth.

### **The Defining Marks of Humble Competence**

#### *1. Applying Practical Leadership*

Practical leadership does not exist in a different realm than the spiritual leadership mentioned earlier. They are two sides of the same coin. We are at times too quick to distinguish between the material and the spiritual, as if God were more concerned about spiritual matters than those related to the physical. A worship leader's spiritual house must be in order, their integrity in check, and their motives pure. But at the end of the day, leadership must be carried out so that ministry can be accomplished.

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<sup>12</sup> Louie Giglio, *I Am Not But I Know I AM: Welcome to the Story of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005).

Moses and David are two worship leaders who *led* their people. They provided organization, dealt with problems and led with courage (most of the time). The patriarchs and tribal leaders of Israel carried out the rituals required for their worship. The Levites demonstrated a organization in their ministry, especially in their music ministry and temple construction. Paul was concerned that Christian assemblies be characterized by order and mutual respect, not disorder and chaos. There was nothing “unspiritual” about the practical, material side of worship leadership.

All of these examples strongly suggest the need for competent leaders who can organize, plan and execute corporate worship. This does not negate the need to delegate ministry; but it does mean that practical worship leadership involves many details which need to be organized. It indicates planning and forethought into worship, not a half-hearted attempt to pull things together at the last minute. Especially in regards to working with musicians and with technology, planning, order and details are a key element of effective worship today.

Some worship leaders are naturally organized, and others need more help. There are many different models of how to practically organize a ministry, but God’s main concern is that worship is led in an orderly, organized fashion. For the worship leader this will certainly involve learning the dynamics of music, singing and technology, so that distractions in worship can be eliminated and the focus can be on Christ.

## *2. Composing New Worship Songs*

One of the more unique contributions of many of the worship leaders in the Bible was their writing of psalms, hymns and worship songs. Moses, David and other Levites crafted poetic expressions of praise that flowed from a heart surrendered to God. In their writing they

demonstrated an ability to communicate through the poetry of their culture. There was skill, intentionality and craftsmanship in this process.

Although in the New Testament we find various examples of hymnwriting (i.e. Mary's Magnificat, Lk. 1.46-55, the song of Revelation, etc.), Paul is the most important among the early church. Though his use of hymns he brought together deep theology and skilled composition. This is reflected some 1,500 years later in the life of Martin Luther, a skilled composer himself. Gene Edward Veith takes note of Luther's use of music in teaching:

A whole class of his compositions were "catechetical hymns," expositions of the basic texts used to teach the elements of the Christian faith: the Ten Commandments (teaching the Law), the Apostle's creed (teaching the Persons of the Trinity, which Luther explained in a way that taught the gospel), and the Lord's Prayer (teaching prayer and the relationship with God).<sup>13</sup>

There is certainly no biblical mandate for worship leaders to be songwriters or composers themselves, and many worship leaders do not view themselves as songwriters. With so many resources now available for new worship songs, worship leaders may not see the value of composing songs themselves. I propose a shift in our thinking about songwriting. Instead of asking, "Why should I write worship songs?" we should ask, "Why *shouldn't* I write worship songs?" There is certainly much biblical evidence to warrant such a question. It was quite common in the Old Testament for worship leaders to compose songs, the grandest being the example of the Psalms (see Appendix D: "The Psalms: Voicing Worship").

What is the value of songwriting for worship leaders? First, it can be an expression of personal worship, even if the songs are never used publicly. Second, the songs themselves can

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<sup>13</sup> Gene Edward Veith, "Songs of Reformation," *World* (Oct. 30, 2004), 36. Incidentally, Veith also speaks to a long-held rumor about Luther's songwriting: "For the record, Luther did *not* take 'bar tunes' and put biblical words to them. That legend comes from a comical misunderstanding. Someone apparently heard a music historian referring to Luther's use of the 'bar form,' which refers to a stanza structure, not to what drunks sing in a tavern. Luther did borrow and adapt tunes from earlier hymns, medieval chants, and contemporary composers, but a good number of his melodies were his own original compositions" (Ibid.).

provide a new expression of praise for the local church if it is deemed usable. This can be an opportunity to emulate the psalmists and their utter honesty in worship. Third, it can encourage other potential songwriters in the local church who may be waiting for a nudge to take up their pens and follow in the footsteps of the ancient psalmists.<sup>14</sup> And fourth, our songwriting can be an important opportunity for teaching biblical truth.

### 3. *Raising the Value of Congregational Singing*

In the Bible, God consistently shows us a picture of a people who relate to him through singing. The Israelites sang at the Red Sea to celebrate their new freedom. The Psalms were used in corporate worship (most notably in the Hallel psalms and the Songs of Ascent). David showed the value he placed on corporate singing and instrumental music by appointing a large number of Levites to temple service.

The tradition continues in the ministries of Jesus and Paul. Jesus is the *Singing Savior* (Ps. 22) who is our worship leader, our *liturgist*. Singing was an indispensable part of Paul's ministry, judging from his instructions to the church, and his own life (Acts 16). Eugene Peterson reminds us that "Moses sings. Miriam sings. Deborah sings. David sings. Mary sings. Angels sing. Jesus and his disciples sing. Paul and Silas sing. When persons of faith become aware of who God is and what he does, they sing. The songs are irrepressible."<sup>15</sup>

If individual and congregational singing is such a vital part of biblical worship, why do so few worship leaders know how to effectively lead singing? That is a complex question that cannot be dealt with here. However, Brian Wren offers a succinct answer: "Few singers of

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<sup>14</sup> For a helpful resource on worship songwriting, see Paul Baloche, Jimmy & Carol Owens, *God Songs: How to Write and Select Songs for Worship* (Lindale, TX: leadworship.com, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 66. For an overview of singing in the Bible, see John J. Pilch, "Singing in the Bible," *The Bible Today*, vol. 34, #1 (Jan. 1996), 38-43.

popular music know how to enable group singing, because their training, skills, and disposition are focused on live performance.”<sup>16</sup> This is an undeniable reality facing worship leaders today. People do not sing as much in public life, and worship leaders do not often possess the skills to enable the congregation to sing effectively.

Before worship leaders can learn to lead singing, and before congregations can learn to sing, we must first understand *why* we sing. Singing is *speech intensified*. When we sing, we take our speech from the realm of information and concepts to the realm of emotion and feeling. Reggie Kidd may be slightly overstating the case when he says that “...a theology that cannot be *sung* is not worth having . . . Authentic Christian faith is not merely believed. Nor is it merely acted upon. It is sung—with utter joy sometimes, in uncontrollable tears sometimes, but it is sung.”<sup>17</sup> However, he points out an important truth: there ought to be an intimate connection between our *theology* and *doxology*. Before we teach people to sing, we must first convince them it is one of the most appropriate vehicles to express our faith in God.

How, then, can worship leaders lift the value of singing and make it more effective? We must first realize that our singing does not need to be perfect. It is not a performance. Rather, it is a heartfelt expression of love to God, and an encouragement to fellow believer, as well as a witness to the world. Second, it may involve educating the congregation in the art of singing. Third, we should ensure that those leading worship are actually effective singers themselves. Fourth, we must choose songs that the average person can sing. This involves selecting songs that are not overly rhythmic, are arranged in a comfortable musical key, and are easy to learn. Fifth, we must be willing to actually lead and direct people during the worship service. And finally, we should take note of the building acoustics and ensure that other instruments are not

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<sup>16</sup> Wren, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Kidd, 13.

drowning out corporate singing. These are only a few suggestions worship leaders may find helpful.

#### *4. Defining & Practicing Excellence*

“Excellence” is a term used often in worship leading circles, simply because the difference between “average” and “excellent” is easily determined. With the advent of recorded music on television, CD’s, the internet, and now the ubiquitous iPod, the average person can quickly discern the production value of music.

This becomes a problem in the local church, where worship leaders usually work with volunteers who possess some talent but are amateur musicians. When the congregation sings, there is usually an immediate difference in quality between the music they hear on the radio and the music used in church. As a result, church musicians often feel inadequate as they try to reach the standard of “excellence” set before them by the worship leader.

But what is excellence from a biblical perspective? To answer this question, we must look at giftedness. The members of the body of Christ have all been given gifts, and some of these are inevitably musical. (Neither Rom. 12 nor 1 Cor. 12 mention musical gifts, yet we can assume that musical giftedness comes from God.) God does not expect us to play or sing at the level at which he has gifted someone else. This does not discount the need for improvement (music lessons, training, etc.) but we cannot deny that some are more gifted than others in music. Therefore, we can define excellence as “doing the best with what God has given you.” In the realm of worship leadership, excellence means staying as much as possible in the areas of our giftedness (although the process of determining our gifts can be usually never a brief one.)

This principle of “staying with our giftedness” applies to leadership, yet there are some activities in which all Christians should participate. This would include singing, praying,

encouraging, worshiping, and others that are hallmarks of a mature Christian life. Not everyone can lead, but everyone can participate in the corporate community life of the church.

The Old Testament is particularly helpful in seeing excellence in action. David excelled in many areas, particularly as a musician, maker of instruments, and psalmist. Likewise, Ethan, Heman and Asaph showed skill and depth in their compositions of psalms, both in terms of artistic quality and theological understanding and appreciation. The priests were a visual reminder of God's desire for excellence, for their ornate garments were made with skill and craftsmanship. They were to fulfill their tabernacle and temple duties with excellence and faithfulness. The Levites were skilled in music, using a variety of instruments in addition to the singers. Their excellence also went beyond music into other areas, such as temple repair.

We cannot ignore the connection between prophesy and music (See Appendix A). Through Miriam, certain Levites, and other musical prophets we see a ministry that held great power. Prophesy functioned primarily to bring about an authoritative word from God, and when combined with effective music it became a potent combination.

Although worship leaders should be none too anxious in proclaiming themselves to be "prophets," worship leadership does have a prophetic function in using music to proclaim the word of the Lord. Prophesy simply involves speaking forth God's divine Word. Worship leaders speak to the issues of worship, guiding and correcting the congregation's worship of God. In this role we call God's people to true worship; we prompt, encourage, motivate, direct, restore and help purify corporate worship.

In our pursuit of excellence we must check our motives. Why do we want to be excellent? As musicians, worship leaders often have fragile egos and need regular encouragement. We all love to receive praise and admiration for our gifts. But our excellence

should not call attention to our gifts. Rather, in our music and art we should seek to eliminate distractions and allow people to focus on Jesus.

How can we pursue excellence in our daily leadership? The three most helpful suggestions are planning ahead, communication and preparation. Most of the frustration in local church worship ministries is due to a failure in one or more of these areas. Planning ahead entails thinking through the details of services ahead of time. Communication involves giving information to those who need it ahead of time. Preparation means that we have rehearsed and are ready to lead worship, play or carry out our ministry. Because of the vital importance of what worship leaders do, there should be no room for sloppiness, lack of preparation or failure to communicate with others. Those in our ministries will pursue excellence to the extent that we model it each week

Reggie Kidd helpfully summarizes the attitude with which worship leaders and musicians should approach excellence:

“. . . in a fallen world, there is no such thing as perfection. In some churches the quest for “excellence” is an idol, regardless of whether “excellence” is defined by standards of so-called “classical” culture or of “pop” culture. Such “excellence” needs to be replaced with the quest to pursue the likeness of Christ crucified and him alone. As good as it gets this side of Christ’s return, we’re never going to get it completely right. There will always be a flat tenor, a broken guitar string, an overly loud organ, or an poorly placed hymn. But it’s okay. The cross means it’s covered. That realization will free us from putting one another under a bondage we’re not meant to have. It will free us to take some risks and make our worship environments places where it’s safe to be grace-needy folks.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kidd, 102. Ron Man also states, “. . . *our worship does not need to be perfect*. Ultimately there is nothing about the quality or excellence of our presentation which makes the worship any more acceptable to God. Of course, one’s heart attitude is of great importance to God—and a sincere heart of worship will indeed strive to offer to God one’s very best as a means of glorifying the God of beauty. But in the final analysis our worship becomes acceptable to God because Christ offers it up as a part of his own worship to the Father. (Man, 37.)

## 5. Centering Our Theology on Christ

Rodney Clapp asks the question, “Whither [where is] theology, once known as the queen of the sciences and presumably a key discipline for colleges devoted to scholarship in an explicitly Christian mode?”<sup>19</sup> This is a very relevant question since worship leaders are known to be some of the least theological people in the church. A brief tour through virtually any hymnal or worship songbook will reveal many songs that are underscored with misinformed, erroneous or just plain dumb theology.

This is not the picture we find in the Bible. For instance, Paul’s hymns in the New Testament show a high Christology mixed with a flair for poetry. He was a theological master who directed the church’s worship toward Christ, whose identity and work is the true focus of the Bible. Not just any thoughts would do; Paul was concerned about the substance and content of worship.

This potent combination of theology and art seems hard to find in the local church, particularly among worship leaders. Henri Nouwen reflects, “Few ministers and priests think theologically. Most of them have been educated in a climate in which the behavioral sciences, such as psychology and sociology, so dominated the educational milieu that little true theology was learned.”<sup>20</sup> Henri Nouwen did not have worship leaders specifically in mind, but his words certainly apply here. Why should worship leaders become more theological, and how can ensure that good theology is the foundation for their worship leading?

First, we must understand and appreciate what theology is. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson define Christian theology as “reflecting on and articulating the beliefs about God and the

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<sup>19</sup> Rodney Clapp, “Whither Theology?” *Books & Culture* (May/June 1999), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 65.

world that Christians share as followers of Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Theology is literally “the study of God.” Those definitions sounds somewhat uninteresting, but anyone who has studied the God of the Scriptures and comes away bored has not truly encountered God’s Word.

Second, we need to understand the purpose of theology. The goal of theology is not to gain more knowledge for its own sake, but ultimately to become a deeper disciple and help others to do the same. In relation to worship leadership, understanding theology is vital to the practical outworking of worship and ministry in the local church. J. I. Packer notes that “the purpose of theology is doxology—we study in order to praise.”<sup>22</sup> The end goal of theology is to help us praise, obey and worship our Creator.

Third, we must understand the content of theology in worship. This is expressed well in the weekly service of Restoration Movement churches as they celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is indeed the central focus of our theology. His identity, mission, life, death, resurrection and teaching ought to permeate our worship songs, for he is truly the focus of all of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

Fourth, worship leaders should take advantage of the potent combination that exists when we bring theology and art together in excellence. Worship songs are an ideal vehicle for reflecting on and articulating our beliefs (as noted by Grenz and Olson above). How is it possible that we can remember the lyrics to hundreds of songs, but have difficulty recalling a few verses of memorized Scripture? The explanation is that music is a vehicle for teaching and

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<sup>21</sup> Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in *Reformation & Revival*, vol. 9, #3 (Summer 2000), 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Read puts it this way: “Robert Webber suggests it this way: *true worship celebrates Christ*. We do more than study truth or feel emotions; we celebrate the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The center of our target has to do with the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, reign, and return of Jesus. Through drama, storytelling, pageantry, symbolism, music, Scripture reading, meditation, testimonies, giving, sharing, and prayer, everything in worship somehow is centered in Christ, who is our life. By this we express God’s worth by celebrating the work of God’s Son. If we miss Christ in the midst of our assembly, we have missed worship. If somehow in the course of Sunday morning it does not become very clear whom we are celebrating, we have not really worshiped.” Ken Read, *Created to Worship: A Practical Guide to Leading the Christian Assembly* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 70-71.

memorizing. We can harness the incredible potential of music to help teach the truths of Scripture.

Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, worship leaders must be theologians themselves. The four suggestions previously noted can only be implemented when Christian leaders (and worship leaders in particular) are students of Scripture. We must be continually learning, studying and growing in the grace and knowledge of God's Word. Without its power in our lives we may be momentarily successful, but will be stagnant and ineffective over the long haul.

#### *6. Effectively Teaching Worship*

In Scripture we see a clear connection between worship leadership and teaching. The Priests were the primary teachers of the law, and were also responsible for directing the sacrificial worship of the people. As a worship leader in a broad sense, Paul was the primary teacher of the early church through his letters and personal ministry.

Although worship leaders are primarily considered to be musicians, they also function in a teaching role. The question is not *whether* one teaches through worship leading; the question is *what* one teaches. A worship leader is always teaching doctrine and content through music, so it is vital to reflect on what we are teaching. This illuminates the importance of being a theologian, for how can we lead others in true, biblical worship when we do not have a proper understanding of it ourselves? Below are three suggestions for how worship leaders can teach more effectively:

First, we need to pay attention to the content of worship songs. What are we saying about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, salvation and a host of other theological topics through our songs?

Second, we may consider teaching about worship in a classroom or small group setting for those interested in learning about biblical concepts of worship. The weekly worship rehearsal can be an effective means of teaching the other “worship leaders” in the church.

Third, we must understand that great teachers are first great learners. The content of our teaching will flow from a heart and mind that is continually stimulated by learning and growth.

James 3.1 issues one of the most frightening warnings that those who teach “will be judged with greater strictness.” Worship leaders are teachers in the classroom of the sanctuary. Our congregations learn as much about God from our music as the preaching that happens during the service. With that in mind, we ought to examine ourselves as teachers of worship.

### Summary

In this chapter we have summarized the defining marks of biblical worship leaders—godly character and humble competence. We find both of these concepts together in 1 Kings 9.4-5. King Solomon had just completed the temple, and the Lord spoke these words to him:

And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’

The Lord’s basic requirements for leaders have never changed, and his words to Solomon hold much wisdom for worship leaders today.

Worship leadership is about *being*. It is about who we are, the life we live, and our communion with God. It concerns being faithful to the call God has extended to us. Our *being* speaks of our attitudes, motives and willingness to serve in whatever capacity God chooses.

Worship leadership is also about *doing*. This concerns the need to carry out our ministry with excellence, faithfulness and for the purpose of giving God the glory.

The ministry of a worship leader is not about music, for that is simply a tool. At its heart, it is about change and transformation. Richard Foster notes, “Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change . . . To worship is to change.”<sup>24</sup> Worship leaders play a key role in facilitating this process, whereby God’s people, in a corporate setting, encounter God and are changed. Just as Isaiah’s encounter with God in the temple resulted in his cry, “Here am I! Send me!” (Is. 6.8), our worship leadership and the services we lead should result in greater obedience to Christ’s commands, and thereby greater honor and glory to God.

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<sup>24</sup> Foster, 173.

## CONCLUSION:

### HOW OTHERS CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS STUDY

When all is said and done, what is the value of a study such as this? Can this mountain of information and insights help bring about change in the everyday life of the local church? If, as Bill Hybels has stated, “the local church is the hope of the world<sup>25</sup>,” this study has little value apart from the education of the author and more importantly, the difference it can make in the church. How might this study benefit others? I see four possible groups who may benefit:

1. Local church worship leaders. This project can be a resource to help evaluate one’s own ministry and spot potentially weak areas (and affirm the strong areas). There are three possible ways to use this as an evaluation tool: 1) The worship leader can evaluate himself or herself by going through the major points in each chapter. This can involve prayer, reflection, journaling, and asking the Lord for insight into one’s heart and ministry; 2) The worship leader can have trusted friends evaluate his or her strengths and weaknesses according to each chapter’s information; and 3) Those serving with the worship leader can use the information in each chapter to evaluate the worship leader. This process should be a mutually affirming environment made up of trusted individuals.

2. Elders and Senior Ministers. Those in oversight over the Worship Leader can use this project as a tool to assist in their annual or regular evaluation process. Again, this should be a mutually affirming and positive process, not designed to tear down or overstate weaknesses but

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<sup>25</sup> This is a common phrase used by Hybels in his teaching messages in various setting, although I cannot cite a specific instance.

to encourage and build up one another. If the church does not use a regular evaluation process perhaps this project can help spark an interest in this vital ministry process.

3. Worship Ministry Search Teams. Groups searching for a staff member to serve in worship and music will benefit from reading the project and understanding the biblical history of worship leadership. This will allow them to have a clearer picture of the role of the worship leader, their responsibilities and the qualities they should seek in the staff member.

4. Teachers, professors, mentors and others training students for worship and music ministry. Perhaps this project will be an impetus for further study of the topic, or will spark discussions of curriculum or courses that may or may not help advance the biblical ideals of worship leadership.

Robert Webber succinctly expresses the importance of the worship leader: “In order for worship to be organized as a corporate expression, there must be leadership—leadership is acknowledged by and representative of the worshiping community, leadership that is able to assemble the resources for worship and to bring to a focus the people’s motivation to express their devotion to the Most High.”<sup>26</sup>

What kind of leader is God seeking to turn this vision into a reality? Two verses of Scripture help provide an answer, and will conclude this project in a fitting and proper way.

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers . . . (Acts 13.26)

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John the Baptist, John 3.30)

May we, like David, serve the purpose of God in our generation, and may we decrease so that Christ may increase.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1 *Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, pg. 163.

## Appendix A: The Prophets: Prompting, Purifying & Restoring Worship

Of all the roles and functions of biblical leaders (kings, priests, judges, elders, deacons, servants, and many others) the prophet is certainly the most unique and misunderstood. The word “prophet” conjures images of wild, untamed men who predict the future and operate in a supernatural realm outside the normal arena of leadership. In this appendix we will examine the role of the prophet as one who prompts, purifies and restores worship among God’s people. We will begin by examining the role of the prophet in Scripture, and then explore the intimate relationship between prophecy, worship and music.

### The Ministry of the Prophet

The word “prophet,” from the Hebrew *nabi*, literally means “to bubble forth, as from a fountain.”<sup>1</sup> Although its etymology indicates “one called,” its use in the Old Testament indicates “one who speaks for another.”<sup>2</sup> For example, when God called Jeremiah he said to him, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1.9). Psalm 45.1 illustrates the concept another way: “My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address verses to my king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.” Just as a scribe did not communicate his own message, but the message of another, a prophet spoke in God’s name and by his authority (Ex. 7.1, 2 Pet. 1.20, 21). He served as the mouthpiece through which God spoke to his people (Is. 51.16, Acts 28.25). Although in modern-day America we often relate prophecy with the foretelling of future events, this was only one dimension of the prophet’s task. Hobart Freeman clarifies the prophet’s role in the Old Testament:

The prophets boldly rebuked vice, denounced political corruption, oppression, idolatry and moral degeneracy. They were the preachers of righteousness, reformers, and revivalists of spiritual religion, as well as prophets of future judgment or blessing. They were raised up in times of crisis to instruct, rebuke, warn and comfort Israel, but interwoven with their ethical and moral teaching are to be found numerous predictions of future events concerning Israel, the nations, and the Messianic kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

The basic function of a prophet in the Old Testament was to be a spokesperson for God, although those who function in a prophetic role were given various titles: “seer” (*roeh*, 1 Sam. 9.9; Amos 7.12), “prophet” (*nabi*, Deut. 34.10; Hos. 6.5), “servant” (Is. 20.3; 50.10), “man of

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<sup>1</sup> M. G. Easton, “Prophet,” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897).

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Allen, *And I Will Praise Him: A Guide to Worship in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Warsaw, IN: Faith Ministries & Publications, 1994), 14. Ken Read also provides a helpful summary of the biblical role of the prophet: “He or she was to warn, speak out to dissuade evil ways, to go where God sends, say what He says, uproot, tear down, destroy or overthrow what He does, and build and plant what the Lord says to build or plant. A prophet declares or tells forth the will and message of God, no more, no less, and nothing besides.” *Created to Worship: A Practical Guide to Leading the Christian Assembly* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 203.

God” (1 Sam. 2.27; 1 Kgs. 13.1), “son of man” (Ezek. 2.1,3).<sup>4</sup> Prophets appear very early in the biblical story, performing their various functions. Enoch foretold the coming of the Lord in judgment (Jude 14), Noah prophesied concerning the flood and the destiny of his descendants (Gen. 9.25-27; Heb. 11.7), and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are generally considered to be prophets (Gen. 20.7).

It was Moses, however, who first took the mantle as the first great prophet of the Hebrews (Deut. 18.15).<sup>5</sup> His ministry was less concerned with predicting future events than with teaching, preaching and law-giving. His brother Aaron and sister Miriam both function in prophetic roles (Ex. 7.1; 15.20). In the period of the Judges Deborah is called a prophetess (Judg. 4.4), and an unnamed prophet is sent to Israel (Judg. 6.8). Although Moses in a sense founded the prophetic institution in Israel, it did not come into full development until the time of Samuel.

During the period of Samuel more formal “schools of the prophets” came into being.<sup>6</sup> The first appearance of such a group occurs in 1 Sam 10.5-13, when Saul encounters a group of musical prophets as confirmation that God had chosen him as king. Samuel functioned as the head of this group, as indicated by 1 Sam. 19.20. Later, both Elijah and Elisha are leaders in a group called “the sons of the prophets” that numbered at least one hundred, since fifty of them had gone to the Jordan when Elijah was taken up to heaven (2 Kgs. 2.1-7; 4.43). These “sons of the prophets” were not sons in the physical sense, but rather, disciples of their leaders. This strategy of gathering groups of disciples had a precedent with Moses and the seventy elders (Num. 11.25), and continued with Isaiah (Is. 8.16), Jeremiah (Jer. 45.1), John the Baptist (Mk. 2.18; 6.29) and Jesus himself, who called disciples to follow him (Matt. 4.19; Mark 1.19,20).

Prophets continued to speak to address the spiritual climate of Israel of both inside and outside the formal order of prophets. During David’s reign, the prophets Nathan (2 Sam. 7.2; 1 Kgs. 1.8) and Gad (1 Sam. 22.5, 1 Chr. 21.9) are mentioned. After the kingdom was divided, both Israel and Judah saw a procession of prophets, including Ahijah (1 Kgs. 11), Shemaiah (1 Kgs. 12), two unnamed prophets (1 Kgs. 13), Jehu and Hanani (1 Kgs. 16), Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22), and Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs. 17—2 Kgs. 8). Several women, in addition to the aforementioned Miriam and Deborah, are recognized as prophetesses during this period. These include Isaiah’s wife (Is. 8.2-3) and Huldah, whose advice was sought by King Josiah (2 Kgs. 22.14-20). Negative examples include Noadiah, who opposed Nehemiah (Neh. 6.14) and the false prophetesses decried by Ezekiel (Ez. 13.17-19).

A significant portion of the Old Testament is devoted to the canonical prophets—those writing a prophecy included in the biblical canon. These are divided into two groups, the four Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel), and the twelve Minor

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<sup>4</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, “Prophet, Prophetess” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 671.

<sup>5</sup> Freeman, 27.

<sup>6</sup> There is no explanation given in Scripture for the origin of the “sons of the prophets.” Some have speculated that these bands or guilds of prophets originated from two other ancient groups, the Rechabites (2 Kgs. 10.1-28; 1 Chr. 2.55; Jer. 35.6-10) and the Nazirites (Num. 6). Both groups, through their vows and ethical practices (which included abstaining from wine), fought to preserve the values and ideals of the Mosaic covenant in the midst of Canaanite idolatry. Some have also suggested that the prophetic order co-existed alongside these two groups in ancient Israel, judging from passages such as Amos 2.11-12 and Jer. 7.25. For additional information, see Freeman, 28-30.

Prophets.<sup>7</sup> The connection between these canonical prophets and worship will be dealt with later. After Malachi delivered his prophecy around 425 B.C., the prophetic voice fell silent for over 400 years.

Prophecy in the New Testament differed significantly from that in the Old Testament in several key areas. First, no New Testament author claimed to be a prophet, with the exception of John the author of Revelation (Rev. 1.3). Second, those considered to be prophets in the New Testament left no written records. We have only secondhand accounts of the words of Jesus, John the Baptist and others. Third, there is not definitive statement about the *content* of prophecy in the New Testament. For example, all of Isaiah is considered to be prophetic, but not every word of Jesus is prophetic. In addition, we know nothing about the prophetic proclamations in the early church worship gatherings. Fourth, the form of prophecy is mainly prose, instead of the more common poetry found in the Old Testament. And finally, prophecy in the New Testament focuses more on the individual instead of the nation of Israel as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Even with these differences, however, prophecy in the New Testament maintains an important continuity with that of the Old Testament: "...it is proclamation of the divine word, first in oral form and sometimes recorded in writing. Prophets are channels for God's revelation of his perspective on right and wrong, his displeasure with sin, his pleas for people to repent, his judgment of sinners and his promise of future salvation."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus is certainly the central prophetic figure of the New Testament. He identified himself as a prophet (Mt. 13.57; Mark 6.4; Luke 4.24; 13.33), and was recognized by others as a prophet (Mt. 14.5; Luke 7.16; Jn. 4.19; Acts 3.22). At various times he was associated with Elijah (Mt. 11.14; 16.14; Luke 9.30). Jesus' miracles, supernatural knowledge and the themes of his preaching (the call to repentance, announcements of judgment, the coming kingdom of God) were certainly reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>10</sup> Closely associated with Jesus was John the Baptist, who preached repentance and declared himself the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of "one crying in the wilderness" who would warn the people to "prepare the way of the Lord" (Is. 40.3; Mt. 3.3). John was declared to be a prophet even before his birth (Luke 1.76), held as a prophet by the people (Mt. 14.5; Mark 11.32), and confirmed by Jesus as being more than a prophet (Mt. 11.9).

Although Paul is the most prolific New Testament author, and is indeed identified as a prophet at least once (Acts 13.1), he generally refers to himself as an *apostle* at the opening of most of his letters. Fragments of Paul's letters are prophetic in the predictive sense (1 Cor. 15.51-52; 2 Thess. 2.1-12; 2 Tim. 3.1-5), and at times Paul encouraged believers to seek the prophetic gift for the purpose of building up the church (1 Cor. 12.31; 14.5). Paul seemed to accept prophecy in the Christian assembly a normal part of corporate worship.

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<sup>7</sup> The designation "Major" and "Minor" do not indicate a prophet's importance, only the relative length of his writings. These categories are not found in the Hebrew Bible, which is divided only into the Law, Prophets and Writings—with Daniel included in the Writings. The canonical prophets can be further divided as follows: 1) Those written to Israel: Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah; 2) Those written to Judah: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah; 3) Those written during the Babylonian captivity: Ezekiel and Daniel; and 4) Those written in the post-exilic period: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

<sup>8</sup> Ryken, et al., 666-667.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 666.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The New Testament mentions other prophets as well, such as Zechariah (Lk. 1.67), Anna (Lk. 2.36), Caiaphas (Jn. 11.49-52), Agabus (Acts 11.27-28; 21.10-11), Judas and Silas (Acts 15.32), four daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21.8-9), and several individuals in the church at Antioch (Acts 13.1). Jesus, Peter and John warned against false prophets (Mt. 7.15-23; 24.24; 2 Pet. 2.1; 1 Jn. 4.1) and false prophets are occasionally identified by name (Acts 13.6; Rev. 2.20). The New Testament concludes with John's Revelation, a unique mixture of circular letter, prophesy and apocalypse. John refers to himself as a prophet (Rev. 1.3; 10.11; 22.7) and concludes the book with a stern warning to anyone who adds or subtracts from the prophecy (Rev. 22.18-19).

It is clear that prophets in Scripture functioned in a variety of times, settings and circumstances. God used both men and women, individuals and groups of prophets to warn his people, call them to repentance and at times foretell future events. Having established a clear understanding of prophecy in Scripture, we now turn our attention to a more specific understanding of the prophets as worship leaders.

### **The Prophets as Worship Leaders**

In the contemporary sense, the term "worship leader" refers to a musician who leads congregational singing in a Christian assembly. But a broader definition of the term would include one who speaks to the issues of worship and gives guidance and correction in the congregation's worship of God. In this sense, more appropriate terminology might include "lead worshipper" or "prompter" of worship. In the Old Testament, prophets indeed fulfilled this role, often addressing the concerns of worship (or lack thereof) among God's people.

Moses spoke of worship primarily as it related to the covenant between God and his people. He acted as the mediator of the Sinai covenant (Ex. 19—24), a ceremony which included the Lord's appearance, a review of the exodus acts, proclamation of the covenant stipulations, a pledge by the people to obey the covenant, giving of offerings, and an eating of the covenant meal.<sup>11</sup> Moses presided at the covenant renewal ceremony, which is described throughout the book of Deuteronomy. The covenant included a section of blessings and curses (Deut 27—29) and concluded with a song of Moses (Deut. 32.1-43). After Moses' death Joshua became the mediator of the covenant, which was renewed twice under his leadership (Josh. 8.30-35; 24.1-28). Contemporary worship leaders certainly function in a prophetic role as they preside over the Lord's Supper, which recalls the new covenant instituted by the blood of Christ (Mt. 26.28; 1 Cor. 11.25, Heb. 9.15). Jesus himself is the guarantor of this better covenant, which is superior to the old covenant (Heb. 7.22; 8.8-13). Our worship and ministry springs from the covenant relationship we enjoy with God (Gal. 3.16).

Israelite worship was unmistakably bound to a specific place, first at the tabernacle under Moses' leadership, and at the temple sanctuary in later times. Prophets were at home in the sanctuary, often carrying out their ministries in that setting. Samuel grew up in the tabernacle and spent his days worshipping and "ministering to the LORD" (1 Sam. 2.18). He was referred to as a "seer" and was needed to bless a sacrifice before a feast (1 Sam. 9.11-13). Indeed, after Samuel's mother Hannah had given him over to serve in God's house, she uttered a prophetic prayer (1 Sam. 2.1-10).

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<sup>11</sup> Richard C. Leonard, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, vol. 1 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 164.

The prophetic association with temple worship continued into the period of the divided kingdom. Isaiah experienced a vision and received his call while in the temple (Is. 6.1, 8), and apparently acted in an advisory role to the king (Is. 7.1-17; 37.1—38.22). Jeremiah, himself from a priestly family, delivered a stern plea to the worshippers of Judah while standing in the gate of the temple, exhorting them to “amend your ways and your deeds” (Jer. 7.1ff).<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel, also from a priestly family, was concerned about the restoration of the temple, where the glory of the Lord dwelt (Ezek. 40—43; 47.1-12). Amos was confronted by the priest Amaziah after prophesying against Israel in the “king’s sanctuary,” and ordered to return to Judah (Amos 7.10-17). The prophet Haggai encouraged the governor Zerubbabel the high priest Joshua to rebuild the house of the Lord (Hag. 1.1-11). These prophets were present or concerned with the central place of worship, speaking the word of the Lord regardless of the personal consequence.

The consistent concern of the prophets was the integrity and character of worship.<sup>13</sup> They continually prompted God’s people and their leaders to walk in obedience and faithfulness. Samuel declared to Saul that “to obey is better than to sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15.22). Elijah passionately presided over a sacrifice designed to prove to the people and the prophets of Baal “that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs. 18.37). The prophet Azariah spoke to King Asa and prompted him to put away idols, repair the altar, sacrifice to the LORD and enter into a covenant (2 Chr. 15.1-15). When King Josiah of Judah discovered that the Book of the Law had been found, he sought the guidance of the prophetess Huldah, who declared a message of doom for Israel, and a message of peace for Judah because of their penitence (2 Kgs. 22.8-20).

The feasts were a point of concern for the prophets. Amos declared a word from the Lord: “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delights in your solemn assemblies” (Amos 5.20). Their outward forms of worship only masked their inner spiritual deterioration. Isaiah declared from the Lord that he was weary of their sacrifices, and that the appointed feasts “have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them” (Is. 1.11, 14). They had failed to seek justice, correct oppression, and look after the fatherless and widows (Is. 1.17).

Malachi, the final prophet of the Old Testament, reserved stern words for the spiritual leaders of God’s people. The priests were offering polluted food to the Lord and despising his name (Mal. 1.6-7). They had corrupted the covenant of Levi, and as a result God threatened curses upon them (Mal. 1.1-2, 4, 8). They had led the people in “robbing God” in their tithes and contributions (3.7-9). Although “the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts,” the priests had failed in their spiritual leadership of the people.

The primary concern of these prophets in relation to worship was to call God’s people, especially the spiritual leaders, back to true worship that sprung from the heart and did not rely on outward rituals. In this way they performed a crucial leadership role in the worship God’s people presented to the Lord.

Prophetic worship leadership in the New Testament is not nearly so prevalent. The clearest example is seen in 1 Cor. 14, the most complete record of a worship assembly in the early church. Paul encouraged the prophetic gift, even more than that of speaking in tongues.

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<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah’s criticisms of worship is revealing: “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm...” (Jer. 7.5-6). This concern is repeated in Mal. 3.5 and many other places.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard, 164.

In fact, he writes that he wanted all to prophesy (1 Cor. 14.1-2, 5). Six times in this passage he notes the purpose of gifts: for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14.3-5, 12, 17, 26). He also notes that prophesy is a sign for believers, and the result of prophesy in regards to outsiders should be that they fall on their face and worship God! (1 Cor. 14.22-25). Prophesy was to be done in an orderly fashion. Prophets were to speak one by one, and two or three prophets at the most were to speak (1 Cor. 14.29-33, 40). In this sense prophets in the Christian assembly were leaders of worship, both prompting and encouraging the worship of believers, but also drawing unbelievers to God through their prophetic words.

We have seen throughout Scripture the close connection between worship leadership and prophecy, and we now turn our attention to the more specific biblical connection between prophesy and music.

### **The Relationship between Music & Prophecy**

It is curious and perhaps revealing that the first direct connection between music and prophecy takes place through a woman's ministry. After the Israelites successfully escaped Egyptian bondage and crossed the Red Sea, Miriam followed the lead of Moses and broke out into song. She "took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourine and dancing" (Ex. 15.20). She is referred to as a "prophetess," but we cannot be sure of the exact nature of her prophetic acts, other than its connection to musical praise in response to the Lord's deliverance.

The next instance of "prophetic music" is described in 1 Sam. 10.1-13. After he anointed Saul as the king of Israel, Samuel gave him three signs that he indeed was the Lord's chosen one to rule over the people. The third sign involved a group of musical prophets: "...you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man" (1 Sam. 10.5). When Saul met these men, he also prophesied with them. Music was the vehicle through which prophesy flowed.

In 1 Chronicles 25.1-7 we see another direct connection between music and prophesy. David and other leaders in Israel set apart for specialized service the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, Levites "who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals." Asaph prophesied under direction of the king, Jeduthun prophesied "with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD."<sup>14</sup> Heman, who is noted as "the king's seer," directed his fourteen sons in the temple service with cymbals, harps and lyres. There was a total number of 288 skillful musicians, including their brothers who were "trained in singing to the LORD."

The prophet Elisha also experienced firsthand the powerful connect between prophesy and music. The armies of Israel and Judah had come together to battle Moab, but after a seven-day march they were without water, and the situation appeared hopeless. Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, asked Jehoram, the evil king of Israel, whether there was a prophet who could provide help. When Elisha came in response, he had only words of indignation for Jehoram: "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you." Elisha then sent for a musician, and then the "hand of the LORD came upon him" (2 Kgs. 3.14-15). The prophet was in an

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Chr. 29.30 also notes that Asaph was a "seer."

uncomfortable situation, but the music calmed his spirit and allowed the message from God to be released.

The true function of a prophet is not simply to predict future events—it is one who communicates to people on behalf of God. Although in Restoration Movement churches the link between music and prophecy is rarely acknowledged, there is an undeniable and powerful relationship between the two presented in Scripture. Music can form the gateway through which a prophetic word from the Lord is spoken through his servants. These concepts are powerfully presented in 1 Chr. 16.9 in the context of David’s song of thanksgiving after the ark had returned to Jerusalem: “Sing to him; sing praise to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” Worship leaders and musicians should follow David’s example and recognize the proper role of music as an aid to various kinds of “prophetic” communication in worship, whether it be through a prayer, sermon, musical solo, congregational song, testimony or other means.

How might this prophetic role manifest itself in a worship service? Richard Foster reflects,

Perhaps there is a prophecy of exhortation that puts us on the edge of our seats because we sense that the *Kol Yahweh* has been spoken. Preaching or teaching that comes forth because the living Head has called it forth breathes life into worship. Preaching that is without divine unction falls like a frost on worship. Heart preaching enflames the spirit of worship; head preaching smothers the glowing embers. There is nothing more quickening than Spirit-inspired preaching, nothing more deadening than human-inspired preaching.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of a prophetic ministry is an uncomfortable one for most Christians. It is not a role we are accustomed to seeing in our churches. Surely not everyone is called to be a prophet, and we should certainly exercise the utmost caution and wisdom in these matters. However, we cannot deny that prophets had a clear role in Scripture, and musicians were often tied to their ministry. A final definition from the *Dictionary of Biblical imagery* may be helpful:

A prophet is a person with a particular calling to see or hear what God is saying, live it out in their own lives and proclaim it to the people round about. The prophet is set apart, called and sent by God himself . . . The prophet thus stands as a reminder that God has a will for the people, that God makes demands on the people, that God cares about what they do and perhaps most of all that God genuinely wants to communicate with them.<sup>16</sup>

May we think on these things, ask God for much wisdom, and practice discernment in our pursuit of biblical truth.

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<sup>15</sup> Foster, 166.

<sup>16</sup> Ryken, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 671.

## Appendix B: Priestly Garments

Ex. 28 outlines in detail the type of garments worn by the high priest and priests, the purpose of which was “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28.2).

The high priest’s garment was very elaborate and signified his status as the chief religious leader among the people. The garment for the high priest was to be made by those who were skillful (Ex. 28.3), and consisted of seven main pieces: a turban, a breastpiece, an ephod (vest), a robe, a coat, a sash (belt), and an undergarment (Ex. 28.4, 42). The turban was woven of fine linen and bore a plate of pure gold that read, “Holy to Yahweh” (Ex. 28.36-37; 39.30-31). The robe was a solid blue garment that bore on its bottom hem an alternating pattern of golden bells and blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates made of yarn. The purpose of the bells was to indicate whether the high priest was dead or alive when he was in the Holy Place (Ex. 28.31-35; 39.22-26). Over the robe the priest wore a linen ephod made of gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Two shoulder pieces were attached to the ephod, each set with a stone engraved with six of the names of Israel’s tribes (Ex. 28.6-14; 39.2-6). The breastpiece was attached to the ephod and was woven in the same colors. On the breastpiece were twelve precious jewels representing the twelve tribes, so that “Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord” (Ex. 28.15-29; 39.8-21). The breastpiece also contained the Urim and Thummim. The coat was a checkered garment of fine linen, and the sash was embroidered with needlework (Ex. 28.39)

The garments for the priests were not nearly as elaborate as those of the high priest, yet they consisted of four pieces: a robe, a sash, a turban, and a special undergarment (Ex. 28.40, 42; 39.27-28). The Old Testament does not reveal great detail about the priests’ garments, but we can assume they used the same colors as the garments worn by the high priest—blue, purple, scarlet and gold.<sup>1</sup> Both the priests and the high priest were required to wear their garments when they entered the Tent of Meeting or when they were near the altar in the Holy Place; otherwise, they could die (Ex. 28.43). There is nothing mentioned in the Mosaic Law concerning special garments for the Levites as a tribe.

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise!*, 144.

## Appendix C: Kings of Israel & Judah Linked with the Nation's Decline

Below is a list of the kings of Israel and Judah whose sin is linked either directly or indirectly with the decline of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

### Kings of Israel

- Baasha (1 Kgs. 15.32)
- Omri (1 Kgs. 16.25-26)
- Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 22.52)
- Jehoram (1 Kgs. 2 Kgs. 3.3)
- Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 13.2)
- Jehoash (2 Kgs. 13.11)
- Jeroboam (2 Kgs. 14.24)
- Zechariah (2 Kgs. 15.9)
- Mehaahem (2 Kgs. 15.18)
- Pekahiah (2 Kgs. 15.24)
- Pekah (2 Kgs. 15.28)

### Kings of Judah

- Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 14.21-22)
- Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21.16; 2 Chr. 33.2)
- Amon (2 Kgs. 21.20; 2 Chr. 33.22)
- Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 23.32)
- Jehoiakim (2 Kgs. 23.37)
- Jehoiachin (2 Kgs. 24.9)
- Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 24.19; Jer. 52.2)
- Jehoram (2 Chr. 21.6)

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of the kings of Judah, many times the text indicates that they did what was evil in the Lord's sight and walked in their father's ways. (Jehoram is the sole example of one who "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.") In the case of the kings of Israel, numerous times the text indicates that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin. The effect of the kings of both Judah and Israel was the same: most of the time they continued in the evil ways of their predecessors and thereby perpetuated the cycle of sin.

## Appendix D: Voicing Worship: The Psalms

Choosing music for congregational worship can be a complicated task. Worship leaders today have a broad range of resources to help them: hymnals from countless publishers, songbooks for praise choruses and worship songs, internet downloads, music written from within the local church, and many other resources. CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc.) currently lists over 150,000 unique worship songs and arrangements available for their license holders.<sup>1</sup> Due to the immense variety of worship music available, the concept of a standard collection of worship songs for God's people has long since passed.

However, there is one collection of songs that has remained the centerpiece of expression for God's people for literally thousands of years. The Psalms of the Old Testament have given voice and song to the praise of God's people for nearly three thousand years. Today, we can look through history and witness how this collection of musical poems has influenced and inspired God's people.

But the Psalms are not mere literature to be analyzed and processed. They are real prayers and expressions of emotion that help us draw near to God and express our relationship with him. Together, the 150 psalms form the prayerbook for God's people. Though it is also a book of theology, a collection of songs, and a volume of poetry, at its heart it is a book of prayer. In his introduction to the Psalms in *The Message*, Eugene Peterson takes note of what the English translations often miss. “*Grammatically*, they are accurate. The scholarship undergirding the translation is superb and devout. But as *prayers* they are not quite right. The Psalms in Hebrew are earthy and rough. They are not genteel. They are not the prayers of nice people, couched in cultured language.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the psalms are full of raw honesty, whether giving voice to the heights of praise or the depths of anger and despair. Thomas Merton observed, “In the Psalms, we drink divine praise at its pure and stainless source, in all its primitive sincerity and perfection.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter will examine four areas related to our study: the development of the Psalms, their theology, their musical and poetic features, and their application for worship leadership. In this overview we will see how the Psalms help form godly character and encourage competence and skill.

### Origin & Development of the Psalms

The title “Psalms” is the English transliteration of the Greek *psalmoi*, the title given to the Psalms in the Septuagint.<sup>4</sup> *Psalmoi* is the plural form of *psalmos*, which can mean a “playing or song of praise,”<sup>5</sup> and was the word chosen to translate the Hebrew *mizmor*, a term indicating a

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ccli.com/UnitedStates.cfm>.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 911.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1956), 3.

<sup>4</sup> The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

<sup>5</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich. electronic ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976. Accessed through Logos computer software.

song sung to musical instruments. (The word *mizmor* is used in numerous psalm headings in the original Hebrew, and was therefore chosen by the Greek translators as the key concept of the entire book.) The cognate verb *psallo* indicates “to play, sing praise.”<sup>6</sup> Within the title itself there is an assumption of instruments, for the Greek title literally means “sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment.”<sup>7</sup> In the Hebrew Old Testament, the title is *tehillim*, which simply means “praises.” Because the form of the psalms is poetry, and titles in Greek and Hebrew indicate both music and praise, we can define a psalm as “a poem that is sung as an expression of praise to God.”<sup>8</sup>

### Authorship of the Psalms

Like any collection of music or literature, the Psalms did not simply “appear” in Israel. The Psalms were written, compiled and edited over a 1,000-year period from the time of Moses to the post-exilic period (after 539 B.C., Ps. 146). Ninety psalms are attributed to a specific author: Moses (Ps. 90), David (73 psalms), Solomon (Pss. 72, 127), Heman (Ps. 88), Ethan (Ps. 89), Asaph (Pss. 50, 73-83) and the sons of Korah (11 psalms). Forty-nine psalms are anonymous compositions.

### Formation of the Psalter

Because the writing of the psalms spanned such a long period, the collection and editing process naturally developed in stages. Under David the music of Israel reached its pinnacle, and he was the driving force behind the organization of the musical guilds (1 Chr. chapters 15-16; 23.1-5, 25; cf. 2 Chr. 23.18). Ps. 72, written by Solomon, concludes with the note, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (72.20)—perhaps indicating an early collection of Davidic compositions (to which Solomon may have added his own to conclude the collection).

Other kings in their attempts at reform reorganized the temple musicians. Solomon and Jehoshaphat organized the temple singers (2 Chr. 5:11-14; 7:6; 9:11; Ecc. 2:8; 2 Chr. 20.21-22). Hezekiah re-established the musical guilds during his reform (2 Chr. 29.25-30; 31.2), and he “commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer” (2 Chr. 29.30), possibly indicating two separate collections of psalms at that point. Throughout these times of reform it is likely that the growing psalter was being continually revised.<sup>9</sup>

Evidence of revision and reworking can be seen in several psalms. Pss. 9-10 and 42-43 may have originally been two psalms instead of four.<sup>10</sup> The brevity of Ps. 117 may be due to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Allen, *And I Will Praise Him: A Guide to Worship in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>9</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). Accessed through Logos computer software.

<sup>10</sup> Pss. 9-10 form an acrostic pattern in the original Hebrew, and are tied together as one psalm in the Septuagint.

being originally tied to a longer psalm.<sup>11</sup> Pss. 14 and 53 are nearly identical, and Ps. 108 actually combines sections from Pss. 57 and 60.

Smaller collections of the psalms existed before being placed into the greater whole. The most notable of these are the “Songs of Ascent” (Pss. 120-134), which were sung by Hebrews on their way to worship in Jerusalem. Other collections were the Hallel songs (Pss. 104-106; 111-117; 135, and possibly 146-150), and the Royal psalms (Pss. 93-99).

These smaller collections of psalms were gradually combined into five distinct books, each with a concluding “doxology” or statement of praise.

Book 1: Psalms 1-41 (Concluding Doxology: Ps. 41.13)

Book 2: Psalms 42-72 (Concluding Doxology: Ps. 72:18-19)

Book 3: Psalms 73-89 (Concluding Doxology: Ps. 89.52)

Book 4: Psalms 90-106 (Concluding Doxology: Ps. 106.48)

Book 5: Psalms 107-150 (Concluding Doxology for entire psalter: Ps. 150)<sup>12</sup>

### Categories of Psalms

It is important for us to understand the “literary type” of the various kinds of psalms. Just as we hold a book, a DVD or a CD in our hands and recognize that it is a product of a creative process, we must also recognize that psalms were born out of various circumstances and worship needs. Today we see the “finished product,” but in their original contexts the psalms were composed for specific situations. As a result, the psalms can be categorized into a number of distinctive groups. Below is a summary of Andrew Hill’s helpful categorization of the literary types evident in the psalms.

1. Hymn—A praise of God’s greatness and majesty as it is revealed in nature and history. A hymn is usually written in a three-part outline: 1) Call to worship; 2) Main section, which includes a motive for praise; 3) Renewed summons to praise God. Examples: 8, 19, 33, 84, 87, 95-100.
2. Individual song of thanksgiving—A song of gratitude for God’s intervention in a time of personal distress. Often this outline is used in both individual and community songs of thanksgiving: 1) Introduction, including an invocation; 2) Recitation of the worshipper’s experience; 3) Conclusion focusing on God’s deliverance and a prayer for future help. Examples: 18, 30, 34, 92, 116.
3. Community song of thanksgiving—A corporate response to God for a specific act of deliverance seen by the nation. Examples: 65, 75, 107-108, 124.
4. Individual lament—A personal expression of doubt about God’s goodness, and an appeal to his grace and compassion to intervene. Often this outline is used: 1) Address to God; 2) Complaint; 3) Confession of trust; 4) Petition; 5) Words of assurance; 6) Vow of praise. Examples: 3-7, 14 (same as 53), 22, 25-28, 56, 69-71, 139-143.

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 104-105.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 195.

5. Community lament—A corporate expression of mourning because God has seemingly abandoned his people. This type of psalms often includes this outline: 1) Call to remember God’s faithfulness; 2) Summons to worship; 3) People lament; 4) Plea for deliverance. Examples: 12, 44, 74, 83, 123, 137.
6. Song of trust—An emphasis on God’s nearness, his compassion and saving power. They often make reference to formal acts of worship—singing, dancing, offering sacrifice, etc. Examples: 11, 16, 27, 62, 121, 131.
7. Wisdom/Torah—A meditation on the righteous life, instruction in the fear of the Lord, and encouragement to good conduct grounded in obedience to the Torah (law), sometimes contrasting the righteous and wicked. Examples: 1, 19, 49, 112, 133.
8. Remembrance (storytelling)—A recitation of God’s past acts of redemption on Israel’s behalf, represented by a confession of faith. Examples: 78, 106, 135, 136.
9. Liturgy—A reflections on aspects of formal Hebrew worship and ritual, especially formal entrance into the temple and covenant renewal ceremonies. Examples: 15, 24, 50, 81, 115, 132.
10. Royal—An exaltation of the Israelite king and/or the Davidic covenant, and points to the divine appointment and protection of the king. Examples: 2, 20, 45, 72, 101, 132, 144.
11. Messianic—An anticipation of the Messiah which specifically makes predicative or prophetic statements about him. A psalm can be labeled “Messianic” when it is applied by a New Testament writer to the life or ministry of Jesus as the Christ. The precedent for reading some psalms in a Christian light comes from Luke 24:44, where Jesus remarked that Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms anticipated his coming. Examples of psalms that have a direct connection to Jesus as the Messiah according to the New Testament writers: 2, 16, 19, 22, 23, 24, 31, 62, 103, 109-111, 118. [Note: There are about 100 direct and indirect references to the psalms in the New Testament—more than any other book of the Old Testament.]
12. Imprecatory—A plea for the punishment or destruction of others by invoking curses, revenge or punishment against them as enemies. Examples: 5, 12, 55, 59, 70, 83, 139.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Theology of the Psalms**

Scholars and Bible students alike have recognized that the Psalms are a “microcosm” of Old Testament theology, so much so that Martin Luther described the Psalms as “a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament.”<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps truest in the sense that the Psalms,

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<sup>13</sup> Hill, 197-201.

<sup>14</sup> Tremper Longman, III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 52. See pg. 152, footnote 1 in Chapter 3: Quoted in J. Anderson, “Introductory Notice,” in *Joshua. Psalms 1-35* by John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries 4 (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), p. vi.

taken as a whole, beautifully express the central theological theme of the Old Testament: God's covenant with Israel. A covenant is an agreement or formal relationship established between two parties. The establishment of the covenant is described in several passages, including Ex. 20, the book of Deuteronomy, Josh. 24 and 2 Sam. 7. The central feature of God's covenant with his people was that "God is our King and we are his servant people."<sup>15</sup> These covenant stipulations included both rights and responsibilities. If Israel kept the covenant they would enjoy divine blessings; conversely, if they did not abide by God's laws they would endure curses.

Not every psalm focuses specifically on the covenant. With such a broad array of themes running throughout the Psalms, there is no single consistent dominating thesis in every composition. However, the *concept* of covenant—the relationship between God and Israel—lies underneath each psalm. Tremper Longman, III identifies several dominant topics connected to the covenant theme: 1) the presence of God (Pss. 18; 29); 2) God's presence in history (Pss. 83; 136); 3) God is King (Pss. 47; 93); 4) God's law (Pss. 15; 19; 24); 5) blessings and curses (Ps. 1); and 6) forgiveness (Ps. 51).<sup>16</sup>

Because of the dominant covenant theme, at times the psalmists would be so zealous for God and the covenant he established with Israel that they would wish harm upon others (Ps. 10.15, 58.6; 69.22-28). The violence contained in these "imprecatory psalms" may seem gratuitous to modern ears, but it was simply a means for the psalmists to express their zealous loyalty to God. Rather than a "personal vendetta" against their enemies, these psalms call for righteousness and justice via the destruction of God's enemies.

The intent of the covenant was not simply to spell out laws and stipulations. Rather, it pointed to the relationship behind the regulations. The Psalms continually speak to the relationship of God to his people—the God who created and loved them, and chose them for a special relationship with himself. Thomas Merton notes, "Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. The function of the Psalms is to reveal to us God as the 'treasure' whom we love because He has first loved us, and to hide us, heart and soul, in the depths of His infinite Light."<sup>17</sup> God has revealed himself to Israel as their treasure; He would be their God, and they would be his people.

But how does the Christian relate to the covenant concept? Clearly the Old Testament covenant was made with Israel, not with the Church. Yet in Jesus Christ, God established a new covenant with his people (Mt. 26.28; 1 Cor. 11.25; Heb. 8.8, 9.15, 12.24). Therefore, we may sing the Psalms not only to our God, but to our Savior. We may take this approach for three reasons: 1) Many of the psalms can be labeled "Messianic" because they make predictive or prophetic statements about the ministry of Jesus; 2) Since Jesus is the Son of God, the praise we direct to God is rightfully His; and 3) Jesus is the rightful heir of David's throne (Lk. 1.31-33; Rom. 1.3). With all confidence we can direct to Jesus our worship informed by the content of the Psalms: our hymns, laments, thanksgiving, remembrance and wisdom.<sup>18</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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<sup>15</sup> Longman, 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-62. For a detailed treatment of the covenant theme in the Psalms, see Richard C. Leonard, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, Vol. 1, pg. 246-56.

<sup>17</sup> Merton, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Longman, 68-73. For a further exploration of Jesus and his connection to the Psalms, see Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

notes, “This is pure grace, that God tells us how we can speak with him and have fellowship with him. We can do it by praying in the name of Jesus Christ. The Psalms are given to us to this end so that we may learn to pray them in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the primary themes of the Psalms is God’s covenant with his people Israel. In Jesus, God’s covenant is made new with us. Our covenant relationship with God through Christ informs everything related to our character and the desire for excellence that proceeds from it. In the next two sections we shall see this excellence given hands and feet through the poetry and music of the Psalms.

### **The Poetry of the Psalms**

The books of the Bible are written in a variety of genres—prophecy, letter, history, biography, wisdom—and as such, must be read and studied according to the rules of their respective genres. The book of Psalms is no exception. Although they are certainly valuable for their theology, history, and other contributions to the biblical canon, we must first appreciate them as musical poems. As such, the psalms utilize the language tools available to poets.

The term “poetry” stirs up in the mind certain sounds and expectations usually associated with Western poetry. Poems and songs familiar to Western readers use features such as rhyme, rhythm and meter to help fix the composition into one’s memory. By contrast, Hebrew poetry uses a different set of tools, allowing its authors to make their compositions memorable. If we are to understand and appreciate Hebrew poetry on its own terms, it is helpful to be familiar with these features. Below are several key features of Hebrew poetry, and corresponding examples from the Psalms.<sup>20</sup>

#### Parallelism

Parallelism is a technique that compares or contrasts statements to emphasize a main idea. By repeating or contrasting the thought, the idea is communicated more forcefully. One might imagine a set of stereo speakers, where the first line comes from the left speaker, and the second line from the right speaker.<sup>21</sup> Several forms of parallelism are found in the Psalms:<sup>22</sup>

*Synonymous Parallelism* echoes the idea of the first line in the second line, thereby restating and emphasizing the idea.

Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain? (Ps. 2.1)

Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other (Ps. 85.10)

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<sup>19</sup> Dieterich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 15.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed analysis the poetic features of the Psalms, see Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 31-57.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Other categories of parallelism exist. John H. Walton lists three types: 1) semantic parallelism (based on word usage); 2) progressive parallelism (based on logical sequence); and 3) grammatical parallelism (based on choice of grammatical forms. John H. Walton, *Chronological Background Charts of the Old Testament*, revised and expanded, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 47.

*Climactic Parallelism* is a form of synonymous parallelism in which words from the first line are repeated in the second line, thereby completing or fulfilling the idea.

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! (Ps. 96.7)

*Antithetical Parallelism* uses the second line of a couplet to state the opposite idea of the first line.

For the LORD knows the ways of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps. 1.6)

For the evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. (Ps. 37.9)

*Synthetic Parallelism* expresses a core idea in the first line and develops or expands the thought in successive lines. The first line expresses a core idea and successive lines develop or expand the thought, producing a “synthesis.”

Blessed is the man who walks not in the  
counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinner,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers; (Ps. 1.1)

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
Let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! (Ps. 95.6)

*Emblematic Parallelism* makes use of word pictures and images. An “emblem” or figure of speech is set forth in the first or second line and explained in the opposite line.

As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
So pants my soul for you, O God (Ps. 42.1)

Your tongue plots destruction,  
Like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. (Ps. 52.2)

### Comparative Language

Peoples and cultures throughout history have used descriptive language to express ideas, and the psalms are no exception. Authors of the psalms frequently use similes and metaphors to help the reader better understand his thoughts.

*Similes* are comparisons using the words “as” or “like.” Psalmists describe the wicked in various ways: they are “like chaff that the wind drives away” (Ps. 1.4), they “sprout like grass” (Ps. 92.7) and are “discarded like dross” (Ps. 119.119). Solomon prayed that his reign would be “like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!” (Ps. 72.6). The children of one’s youth are “like arrows in the hands of a warrior” (Ps. 127.4).

*Metaphors* are also comparisons, but use stronger language by stating that one thing *is* another. The Lord is a “sun and shield” (Ps. 84.11) and “my rock and my fortress and my deliverer” (Ps. 18.2). The Psalmists’ enemies are “bulls” and “dogs” (Ps. 22.12, 16), or “lions” and “fiery beasts . . . whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords” (Ps. 57.4).

*Personification* occurs when the author gives human characteristics to non-human objects. Natural objects are often the focus of personification, as in Ps. 19.1: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” The seas are no exception: “The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods life up their roaring” (Ps. 93.3). Other objects are personified as well: “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (Ps. 24.7, 9).

### Refrains

A refrain is a recurring phrase that indicates the breaking points or stanzas in a psalm. Ps. 107 is broken up into four stanzas, each ending with this refrain: “Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!” (Ps. 107:8, 15, 21, 31). Another example is Pss. 42-43, which were originally one psalm, linked by the refrain found in 42.5, 11 and 43.5: “Why are you so cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” Other refrains in the psalms include Ps. 46.7, 11; 57.5, 11; and 67.3, 5.

### Acrostics

A handful of psalms are written as acrostics, where each couplet (or verse) begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Pss. 34, 111, 112 and 145 are written as acrostic psalms. The crown jewel of acrostics is Ps. 119, in which each of the twenty-two stanzas begins with a successive Hebrew letter, and each couplet within each stanza begins with the same Hebrew letter. This demonstrates a great deal of artistry and thought. The theme of the psalm is introduced in verse 1: “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.” Ps. 119 explores various facets of obedience to God’s law, and closes appropriately with this plea: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments” (119.176).

These various poetic features of the psalms remind us of their basic nature: they are works of *art*. C. S. Lewis reminds us of the importance of reading the Psalms with their poetic nature in mind:

Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; not less than French must be read as French or English as English. Otherwise we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1958), 3.

## The Music of the Psalms

As much as it is helpful to understand the poetic features of the psalms, we must remember that they were originally written not to be read, but to be sung. The element of music in the psalms is not simply a side feature—it is a key artistic device that, when combined with the raw emotion and deep theology of the psalms, produces a powerful means of expressing worship both individually and corporately. The gift of music is central to the praise of God’s people, so much so that Martin Luther said, “He who despises music . . . does not please me. Music is a gift of God, not a gift of men. . . . After theology I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor.”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, theology is given a voice to express itself in the Psalms. Although we cannot know what the psalms sounded like in their original form with any degree of certainty, the psalms themselves give some indication of what the music may have been like.<sup>25</sup> Below are several musical features evident in the Psalms.

### Performance Directions

Approximately half of the psalms contain superscriptions with specific instructions.<sup>26</sup> “To the Choirmaster” (or Choir Director) is a common superscription (Pss. 6, 31, 36, 67, 80, etc.). Some psalms in their superscriptions designate certain melodies or tunes to which the psalm is to be played or sung: “The Doe of the Dawn” (Ps. 22), “Lillies” (Ps. 45, 69), “The Dove on Far-Off Terebinths [Oaks]” (Ps. 56), and “Do Not Destroy” (Ps. 57-59, 75).

Other superscriptions make reference to various types of psalms. Although we cannot be fully certain what all of these mean, these include: “petition” (Pss. 38, 70), “psalm” or “song,” indicating accompaniment by instruments (Pss. 15, 48, 67, 108 and many others), “maskil,” a contemplative or wisdom psalm (Pss. 45, 142), “miktam,” a song of atonement (Pss. 15, 56-60), “prayer” (Pss. 17, 90), and “psalm of praise” (Ps. 145, ironically the only psalm that bears the actual Hebrew title of the book of Psalms). Psalm 120-134 are designated as “Songs of Ascents” (literally “songs of the going up”), so named because they refer to psalms sung on the way to the annual festivals in Jerusalem.

Another common superscription is the term “Selah,” which indicates a pause or break of some kind. The term is used seventy-one times in thirty-nine different psalms. It may refer to a musical interlude where vocal or instrumental music is featured, or some kind of refrain is used.

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<sup>24</sup> Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 23. See footnote 3. Quoted in Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), vol. 2, 980.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Leonard states, “It is regrettable that today we have little concrete knowledge of how psalmic music actually sounded, although some of the oldest liturgical chants of the church have been shown to have features in common with Yemenite Jewish music, which in turn may have been preserved with little change from biblical times.” Richard C. Leonard, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, vol. 1 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) 244.

<sup>26</sup> Hebrew texts of the Psalms assign verse 1 to the superscription. As a result, Hebrew verse numbers for psalms containing superscriptions will be one number greater than their English counterparts.

## Musical Instruments

The superscriptions frequently contain details about the instruments to be used in the psalm, such as various stringed instruments (Pss. 4, 55, 67), flutes (Ps. 5), tambourine and trumpet (Ps. 81, 150), and cymbals (Ps. 150). Some psalms mention instruments in their promise to worship or invitation to the reader to give praise to God, such as “I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God” (Ps. 43.4), or “Raise the song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp. Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day” (Ps. 81.2-3).

## Antiphonal Psalms

These types of compositions are intended to be performed by two or more groups. A good example is Ps. 136, in which all twenty-six of its couplets end with “for his steadfast love endures forever.” This refrain was possibly sung by one choir in response to the first line sung by another choir. Ps. 24 is commonly thought to be a dialogue between two choirs, one seeking to enter the sanctuary, possibly bearing the ark of the covenant, and the other choir standing at the gate.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps it would be sung as follows:

### *Choir 1*

Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
That the King of glory may come in.

### *Choir 2*

Who is this King of glory?

### *Choir 1*

The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory!

Psalm 118 is another example of an antiphonal arrangement. Here, it is possible that three groups are used: “Israel” (God’s covenant people), “the house of Aaron” (the priests), and “those who fear the LORD” (possibly Gentile worshippers or another group). All three groups are encouraged to repeat the phrase, “His steadfast love endures forever.” This three-choir arrangement can also be seen in Pss. 115.9-11 and 135.19-20. Pss. 124 and 139 begin with the worship leader inviting the people to join in (“let Israel now say”). Although antiphonal psalms do not comprise a large amount of the total psalms, they are a powerful method of inviting interaction between various groups singers and worshippers.

It is clear that music is a vital feature of the psalms, since many of them contain specific instructions for choir directors and musicians. The psalmists use their skill and creative ability to craft musical accompaniment appropriate to the text as well as their cultural context. Not just any tune would do! In performing and leading the psalms there was a clear need for musical leadership, knowledge, skill and organization to effectively play and sing them.

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<sup>27</sup> Leonard, 244.

## The Psalms in Israel's Worship

If we are to see the Psalms as a resource for developing the necessary character and competence for worship leadership, and if we are to understand their value for Christian worship, we must appreciate their use in the worship of Israel. As the “hymnbook” of Israel, the Psalms formed a centerpiece of both the public and private lives of God’s people. Although today in the evangelical church we tend to think of the Psalms as a collection of prayers<sup>28</sup> written by individuals as personal prayers to God—and although we use them mainly in that way—nothing could be further from the truth. In volume 1 of his commentary on the Psalms, Gerald Wilson states,

Scholars generally agree today that most of the psalms (some say even all) were composed, not for private prayer, but for public performance in the temple worship of ancient Israel. If this is so, then even the individual psalms were not composed simply for private use but were intended to be presented—performed, if you will—within community worship.<sup>29</sup>

The superscriptions of the psalms support this view. Surely the psalms would not include the various performance and musical notations (noted above) if they were only intended for personal worship.<sup>30</sup> Many of the superscriptions link the psalm to an act of formal worship, as in Ps. 30 (“a song at the dedication of the temple”), Pss. 38 and 70 (“for the memorial offering”), Ps. 92 (“a song for the sabbath”) and Ps. 100 (“a psalm for giving thanks”). Many psalms make reference to the guilds of singers appointed to serve in the temple: Asaph (50; 73-83), the Sons of Korah (42; 44-49; 84-85; 87-88), Heman (88) and Ethan (89).<sup>31</sup>

Other psalms make reference to specific acts of worship within the text of the psalm itself. Various items are mentioned, including a procession in God’s house (Ps. 42.4; 68.24-27), being in God’s house and/or bowing down “toward your holy temple” (Ps. 5.7; 66.13; 84.10), the “great throng” (Ps. 109.30), the sanctuary (Ps. 63.2), the altar (Ps. 26.6), and being in the presence of “all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem” (Ps. 116.14, 18-19).

A portion of the psalms were also used in connection with festivals. Psalms 113-118, known as the Hallel psalms, were sung as part of the New Moon, Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, and Dedication Feasts. Other connections between psalms and feasts included the

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<sup>28</sup> For a detailed look at the Psalms as a prayer book, see Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, 23. Andrew Hill disagrees: “Many of the psalms were originally private prayers and devotional responses to God; only later did they become public songs of worship” (Hill, 203). It is not always clear whether individual psalms were composed strictly for the purpose of public worship. However, the fact remains that they *were* used for that purpose, as this section will demonstrate.

<sup>30</sup> Even if the performance instructions were added after the psalms were composed, those containing instructions were still used for corporate worship.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, 24. See Chapter 3 (Celebrating Worship: The Levites) for further information on these individuals and their ministry.

Feast of Purim (Ps. 7), the New Year's celebration (Ps. 47) and the Pilgrimage festivals (the Songs of Ascent, Pss. 120-134).<sup>32</sup>

At times special circumstances warranted the creation of a new psalm of worship. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem he commissioned a song of thanksgiving to God (1 Chr. 16.7-36). The psalm here is actually constructed from portions of Pss. 96, 105 and 106, suggesting that there was some sort of established canon of the psalms at this time.<sup>33</sup>

The use of the Psalms continued into the New Testament. The New Testament quotes Psalms more than any other Old Testament book except for Isaiah (there are over four hundred quotations or allusions to Psalms).<sup>34</sup> The New Testament writers were especially interested in Ps. 2, which focuses on Christ's sonship, and Ps. 22, which alludes to Christ's death. Ps. 110 is the most-quoted book in the New Testament. Christians continued to sing psalms in worship (Eph. 5.19; Col. 3.16).<sup>35</sup>

The Psalms are an incredible model and resource for worship leadership. In no other book of the Bible do we find such a rich and relevant combination of theology, artistry, music and emotion.<sup>36</sup> The Psalms speak to the whole person—mind, heart, soul and strength.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps it is no accident that Jesus instructed us to love God in this way (Mk. 12.30). As equal parts prayer book<sup>38</sup> and hymnbook, Psalms forms the character of God's people and inspires the competence of their craft.

### Summary of Defining Marks

How do the Psalms model and shape godly character, and demonstrate and inspire humble competence? Below are a variety of observations on how the Psalms speak to these defining marks of a worship leader:

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<sup>32</sup> Hill, 205.

<sup>33</sup> Walvoord & Zuck, accessed through Logos Bible software.

<sup>34</sup> Hill, 207.

<sup>35</sup> For further information see Hughes Oliphant Old, "The Psalms of Praise in the Worship of the New Testament Church," *Interpretation*, vol. 39, #1 (Jan. 1985), 20-33.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Allen observes that the longest book of the Bible is indeed a book of music (Allen, 22).

<sup>37</sup> Because God speak to our whole person through the Psalms, we should also respond with our whole person. Richard Foster observes, "Praise is another avenue into worship. The Psalms are the literature of worship and their most prominent feature is praise. "Praise the Lord!" is the shout that reverberates from one end of the Psalter to the other. Singing, shouting, dancing, rejoicing, adoring—all are the language of praise" (Foster, 168). Reggie Kidd also reflects, "With David's songs, a God who is invisible shows the shape he can take in the human heart . . . His songs become the impetus for a generations-long project: hymn writers and collectors embody Israel's story and emotional life in the book of Psalms" (Kidd, 16).

<sup>38</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes, "Who prays the Psalms? David (Solomon, Asaph, etc.) prays, Christ prays, we pray. We—that is, first of all the entire community in which alone the vast richness of the Psalter can be prayed, but also finally every individual insofar as he participates in Christ and his community and prays their prayer. David, Christ, the church, I myself, and wherever we consider all of this together we recognize the wonderful way in which God teaches us to pray" (Bonhoeffer, 21).

## Character

- We speak of *godly* character because our character begins with God. In the Psalms there is a recognition that our character flows first of all from recognizing who God is and entering into a covenant relationship with Him. (Christians enter into this covenant through Jesus.) God is the initiator of the relationship, and our worship consists of our response to God's divine initiative. Our character is defined by our response to God.
- The psalms mention a wide variety of themes connected with character. For example, Ps. 1 speaks of the righteous man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked<sup>39</sup>, and Ps. 51 shows the need for repentance from sin.
- We have the example of the psalmists themselves and the character they displayed (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of David and Chapter 3 for a discussion of the Levites).
- In the psalms we are encouraged to bring before God all of our emotions: anger, joy, praise, sorrow, lust, lament. Character is commonly associated with the word "integrity," which refers to a person who is "integrated" or whole. His or her interior life matches the one on display. Having an integrated life means bringing our whole person (emotions, thoughts, desires, deeds) before God and submitting them to his will. This is a life lived totally "in the presence of God" (Latin *coram deo*); a life of utter honesty before our Creator.
- In a similar way, the psalms address a variety of themes and topics: life and death, anger, frustration, joy, sorrow, sin, healing, forgiveness. No topic was off limits. This is an important consideration for worship leaders who often avoid more solemn topics such as death and lament in contemporary worship.
- Finally, we see in the Psalms a *humility* that does not draw attention to itself, but rather focuses on God and his praise and glory. Many of the psalms are anonymous composition—perhaps a sign of the psalmist's humility and insistence that God get all the attention. (How might this apply to our modern concerns over copyright for worship songs?)

## Competence

- The Psalms feature a wonderful array of diversity and variety in music, use of instruments, style, poetry, theology and other areas.
- The superscriptions indicate a concern for musical organization and excellence.
- The Psalms plumb theological depth in an artistic form. This has wonderful application for songwriters today, who ought to use their creativity to excel in both the theological and artistic realms. Eugene Peterson refers to theology as "people of faith using their minds to understand who God is and how he works."<sup>40</sup> This should be the goal of worship songwriters today: to broaden the mind and touch the emotions.

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Merton observes that the foundation of character is set forth in the first psalm. "If there is one theme that is certainly to be found implicitly or explicitly in all the Psalms, it is the motif of Psalm One: 'Blessed is the man who follows not the counsel of the ungodly. . . but his delight is in the law of the Lord.' If there is one 'experience' to which the Psalms all lead in one way or another, it is precisely this: delight in the law of the Lord, peace in the will of God. This is the foundation on which the psalmists build their edifice of praise" (Merton, 17).

<sup>40</sup> Peterson, *Answering God*, 13.

- There was care, skill and reflection in the process of composing and choosing psalms for worship in ancient Israel. New songs were written for various occasions. There was an intentionality to the process of selecting or writing worship music for congregational singing. The composers were familiar with the cultural conventions of their art and were skilled in their craft. There were creative and used various means of expressing truth.
- Musical leadership is key in the psalms. Many of the superscriptions contain musical direction for the “choir director” or “choirmaster.” These were intended to be sung, played or performed to certain tunes or settings. We should not be afraid to exercise leadership in worship and music ministry. Musicians and congregations should be willing to come under the direction of a competent leader who directs choirs, musicians and music in corporate worship.
- There is the value of corporate singing, as we see in the psalms connected with the festivals, as well as the Hallel psalms and Songs of Ascent.
- In a greater sense we see the overarching value of the psalms in corporate worship life. The New Testament writers used the Psalms often. Bonhoeffer noted the importance of the Psalms for worship: “Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power.”<sup>41</sup>
- In no other book of the Bible do we find such a rich combination of theology, artistry and emotion. The Psalms speak to the whole person, not just the emotions or intellect.
- The Psalms function in a teaching role in corporate worship.
- We are encouraged to sing to the Lord a “new song,” the biblical mandate for continually new and fresh expressions of musical praise.
- Many of the psalms are anonymous compositions; a contribution given to worship with no expectation for recognition. What application might this have for the modern concern over copyright?

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<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, 26.

## Appendix E: Jesus: The Singing Savior

The only instance of Jesus singing in the Gospels is Mt. 26.30 (cf. Mk. 14.26), when he and the disciples sang a hymn after the Passover meal/Last Supper. In all likelihood they sang portions of Ps. 113-118, known as the “Hallel Psalms.” But Jesus’ voice is clearly present in the Old Testament, most notably in Psalm 22, a psalm of David declaring his agony at the hands of his enemies, but also a prophetic song pointing to the suffering and victory of Christ.

The psalm begins with the cry that is echoed in the Gospels: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22.1, cf. Mt. 27.46 and par.). Various details from the psalm are included in the Gospel accounts: the mocking crowd (Ps. 22.7; Mt. 27.31, 41-44 and par.), his dry mouth (Ps. 22.15; Mt. 27.48 and par.), evildoers who pierce his hands and feet (Ps. 22.16; Mt. 27.35 and par.), garments divided and lots cast (Ps. 22.18; Mt. 27.35 and par.). But the oppression of death is overtaken by a spirit of hope in verse 22, which is quoted by the writer of Hebrews: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Heb. 2.12, cf. Ps. 22.22).

The writer of Hebrews quotes directly from the LXX,<sup>1</sup> so it is beneficial to compare the original Hebrew with the LXX’s translation.<sup>2</sup> The chart below illustrates the differences between the English, Hebrew and Greek terms/meanings:

English (ESV) <b>Ps. 22.22</b>	English (ESV) <b>Heb. 2.12</b>	Hebrew <b>Ps. 22.23</b>	Greek <b>Ps. 21.23 (LXX OT)</b> <b>Heb. 2.12 (Greek NT)</b>
“congregation”	“congregation”	<i>qahal</i> – “assembly, community, congregation”	<i>ekklesia</i> – “congregation, church, assembly”
“I will praise”	“I will sing your praise”	<i>halal</i> – “praise, cheer, extol, verbal song and singing with the same themes” <sup>3</sup>	<i>hymneo</i> – “sing praise, sing hymns” <sup>4</sup>

Although the differences are not substantial, the chart explains the slight difference between the Hebrew and the LXX. The meaning of *halal* does not necessarily mean to sing, although it can refer to singing. However, the translators of the LXX have taken this meaning, which carries over into the New Testament. This is not the case with the major English versions, whose Old

<sup>1</sup> The term “LXX” refers to the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament which was completed between 150-200 B.C. It is commonly referenced as the LXX due to the legend that seventy-two scholars contributed to the translation, although there is no evidence of a specific number of contributors.

<sup>2</sup> The verse number for the Hebrew is Ps. 22.23 instead of 22.22 due to the Hebrew’s inclusion of the superscript of each psalm as the first verse. The LXX follows this practice, in addition to combining psalms 9 and 10, which accounts for the Psalm numbers themselves being less than their Hebrew counterparts.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew meanings taken from James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Electronic ed. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Greek meanings (both LXX and New Testament) taken from James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*. Electronic ed. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, and Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint : Revised Edition*. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2003.

Testaments are based on the Hebrew Masoretic text, not the Greek LXX. Modern English translations of Ps. 22.22/23 render *halal* as “I will praise you/thee,” thereby leaving out the element of singing.<sup>5</sup> The essential point is that the translators of the LXX incorporate an element of singing that is not automatically evident in the text. However, since David (the author of Psalm 22) was a musician, and because *halal* can refer to singing, the LXX translators found it appropriate to incorporate a musical element in their translation.

The translation issue notwithstanding, the writer of Hebrews applies this verse to Jesus: “In the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” Here we find our Singing Savior, Jesus. Reggie Kidd observes, “In the church Jesus is chief liturgist or worship leader, both declaring the Father’s name and singing his praises.” Because of the power of his resurrection, he is the “Architect of Praise, Lord over a house of flesh and blood that God is building where he inhabits his people’s praise.”<sup>6</sup>

This is an important connection to understand if Jesus is to be the foremost model for one of the primary functions of worship leaders—leading the people’s song in the corporate assembly. Jesus is not only our Savior, he is our *Singing Savior*. Just as David was called the “sweet psalmist” (2 Sam. 23.1), so Jesus may be called the “Sweet Singer.” But Jesus is superior than David in every way. Kidd again notes that “the risen Jesus is the true heir of David. He returned to build a better temple than David’s first heir did, not a building that *houses* people singing but a building that *is* people singing.”<sup>7</sup> Through his voice, Jesus demonstrates that he is our leader because he is first a worshiper of the Father himself.

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<sup>5</sup> This includes translations that lean toward the literal, such as the ESV, NASB, NRSV and King James, as well as those that are more “dynamic-equivalent” or “thought-for-thought,” such as the NIV and NLT.

<sup>6</sup> Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

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