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THE DEVELOPING ROLE OF THE INSTRUMENTAL  
MINISTRY AT WHITESBURG BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Timothy Lee Bandy  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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MINISTRY AT WHITESBURG BAPTIST CHURCH  
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## PREFACE

I can still remember with crystalline clarity, so sharp that it hurts, the moment I started reading the first book for my first “leveling course” in the DEdMin program at SBTS. “I must be insane to think I can do this” I thought as I lurched through prose that seemed equal parts dry, dense, and indecipherable. Thankfully, the books got better—much better—and the process of working my way through this adventure in higher education became a tremendous blessing in my thinking, my understanding of the Bible, my ministry, and my view of God.

Therefore, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the many people who have made this project possible. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my church, Whitesburg Baptist, and our senior pastor, Daryl Craft. They have provided generous financial and spiritual support without which the project would have been unthinkable. Rick Stone, our worship pastor, has always had a listening ear and a word of encouragement whenever I needed it. My orchestra members have been patient with my leadership, dedicated in their service to the church, and most of all, a joy to work with week in and week out.

My wife, Alison, has played the most important role in cheering me on every step of the way and offering me the freedom and space to dedicate myself to study. I could have never finished this project without her unwavering support. I was also blessed with a father and mother who encouraged all my creative endeavors, in particular a dad who modeled a life of wonder: a wonder at the beauty of creation and a fascination with creativity in any form or style. He was continually captivated by the glory of God and entranced by his truth as he modeled the life of a Christian artist, thinker, and disciple. I would also like to thank my brother, Greg, who agreed to proofread my project even

though he had recently completed his own post-graduate degree. As a long-time writer, his input was immensely helpful.

Dr. Brian Hedrick was another enormous help. His own treatise on instrumental worship provided inspiration for my dissertation, and he graciously took the time to read through my work and provide invaluable feedback.

Finally, I thank my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Crider, Dr. Timothy K. Beougher (my second reader), and the many other professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for challenging, stretching, and growing me in ways I had never thought possible. You have had a profound impact on my life and ministry. God bless you.

While my first misgivings at embarking on a DEdMin were certainly not the last, God proved faithful and enormously gracious in balancing the demands of family, ministry, and sanity. To Him be all the glory. Amen.

Timothy Bandy

Huntsville, Alabama

May 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1972, R. O. Stone, Minister of Music at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida, suggested to Camp Kirkland that he establish an instrumental ensemble at the church. They began with seven volunteer players and the modest goal of giving members the opportunity to use their instrumental gifts in church.<sup>1</sup> By 1976, the ministry had grown large enough that Kirkland was asked to become the first full-time instrumental director in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).<sup>2</sup> Over the next twenty-five years, orchestra ministries became common in the SBC, especially among larger churches. Kirkland presided over the creation of the Metro Instrumental Directors Conference (MIDC), with 250 members and an annual conference.<sup>3</sup> Orchestras were considered a means of engaging musically gifted church members, amplifying the impact of the worship ministry, and drawing in musicians from the community.

In the last two decades, however, the perception is that church orchestras are on the decline, coinciding with the decline of church choirs. In general, growing churches

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<sup>1</sup> Camp Kirkland explains, “We launched with about seven players. I have to say there was no particular spiritual insight from me into forming the group, but it was an opportunity for me and others to use our instrumental musical gifts in church. I was never given any real guidance on the biblical or spiritual ramifications of doing this.” Camp Kirkland, email to the author, June 9, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Camp Kirkland Productions, “Meet Camp Kirkland,” accessed December 31, 2018, <http://www.campkirklandproductions.com/about/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Metro Instrumental Directors Conference was formed in 1980 by Camp Kirkland at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL. This group consists of full-time and part-time church orchestra directors drawn mostly from Southern Baptist churches. Approximately 250 members are on the mailing list and an average of fifty members attend the annual conference, which rotates between member churches.



typically feature a more contemporary worship style employing a small rhythm section<sup>4</sup> and a small, select group of vocalists. For example, in her Facts on Worship survey, Marjorie H. Royle comments, “The last twenty years in the United States have seen great changes in worship from Traditional to Contemporary, as, in some places, praise bands with electronic keyboards, drums, and electric guitars have replaced organs and choirs.”<sup>5</sup> The same report shows that the percentage of churches which always use electric guitars or drums increased from 29 percent to 43 percent between 2000 to 2010.<sup>6</sup> Royle continues,

The use of drums, electric guitars, and projection equipment all were positively related to growth. . . . Contemporary music and innovative worship both were particularly helpful in attracting young adults. Congregations that included these elements in worship had a significantly higher percentage of young adults ages 18 to 35 in them than those that did not.<sup>7</sup>

Among MIDC members, the conventional wisdom is that lead pastors see these trends and decide that a choral-instrumental ministry is incompatible with effective outreach because it is incompatible with contemporary worship. This project aims to demonstrate that an instrumental worship ministry not only has strong biblical support and practical benefits for a local church but is also in line with cultural developments and musical expression. To this end, I developed a biblical theology of instrumental ministry, which was used to create a curriculum of instrumental worship to teach the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra, and to provide a clearly articulated foundation for the instrumental worship ministry at Whitesburg Baptist Church.

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of this project, a rhythm section consists of bass guitar, drums, lead guitar, rhythm guitar, and possibly keyboard(s). An instrumental ensemble adds a horn section or string section or wind section to the core rhythm section.

<sup>5</sup> Marjorie H. Royle, “FACTS on Worship: 2010,” accessed November 5, 2019, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FACTs-on-Worship.pdf>, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Royle, “Facts on Worship: 2010,” 12.

<sup>7</sup> Royle, “Facts on Worship: 2010,” 13.

## Context

The project took place in the context of the orchestra ministry of Whitesburg Baptist Church (WBC) in Huntsville, Alabama. The Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra (WBO) has been a regular part of worship since the 1980s. The WBO plays every week for the 9:30 a.m. worship service, accompanying the choir and congregation, and performs orchestral specials on a regular basis. The 9:30 a.m. service has approximately 1,000 attendees and the orchestra averages between 20-25 players. The 11 a.m. service is led by a rhythm section and small vocal ensemble. WBO is a cross-generational ministry with ages ranging from high school to senior adult. The broader context of the WBO is that the median age of the church is above fifty-five and the senior pastor of forty years retired in 2018. The new pastor began his ministry in October 2018. His leadership has led to a revitalization of the staff and comprehensive renovation of the worship and children's facilities, while attracting a younger demographic to the church.

The WBO faces the general trend of a decline in church choral and orchestral ministries described in the Facts survey, and also as seen in a 2014 study by Mark Chaves and Shawna L. Anderson. In their survey of 1,331 congregations, they determined that so-called "informal worship" in American congregations had increased sharply between 1998 and 2012. The increase was measured by such indicators as the use of drums (up from 25.1 percent to 45.5 percent), the use of visual projection equipment (up from 14.9 percent to 45 percent), and the raising of hands (up from 48.1 percent to 59 percent). The use of choirs, in contrast, experienced a significant downturn (from 72.3 percent to 57.3 percent).<sup>8</sup> If church choirs are in a state of steady decline, then the assumption is that church orchestra ministries are following a similar trajectory, since one of their primary roles is often the accompaniment of the choir and since orchestral music is usually associated with a traditional style of worship.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Chaves and Shawna L. Anderson, "Changing American Congregations: Findings from the Third Wave of the National Congregations Study," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 4 (2014): 21.

While few studies exist that examine the state of church orchestra ministries, anecdotal evidence seems to back up the perception that their decline parallels church choral programs. Informal discussion with MIDC members revealed that several members had first-hand knowledge of churches that had made the transition from a choir-orchestra based worship model, to a contemporary band-driven worship model. Almost always, the stated reason is that a contemporary band-driven worship style is unequivocally the best option to reach an unchurched audience. Some churches made such a transition even though their choir-orchestra ministries were highly successful, involving large numbers of long-term, dedicated volunteers. In such cases, churches were not cutting programs that were floundering or unhealthy or which had little visible impact, they cut programs which played a significant role in their identity and their volunteer base, and required painful staffing decisions. In light of such statistics and examples, church orchestra ministries need to consider the connection points they have to their cultural context and carefully lay out the biblical foundations for their existence.

While larger instrumental ensembles might be falling out of favor in churches, they continue to play a major role in culture at large. For example, at least four of the current late-night talk show hosts continue to feature horn sections in their show bands on major television networks.<sup>9</sup> Although a horn section is not necessarily a large ensemble (sometimes a single trumpet, saxophone, and trombone form a horn section), it presents an instrumental expansion over band-driven worship. In a similar vein, horn bands such as Snarky Puppy, No BS! Brass Band, and Funky Knuckles have hundreds of thousands, if not millions of views on their YouTube channels. A recently formed horn band, Leonid and Friends, has millions of views of their covers of a variety of original tunes. Even a cursory survey of YouTube music channels reveals a staggering variety of instrumental ensembles beyond the core rhythm section favored by contemporary churches.

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<sup>9</sup> Shows such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*.

A second cultural trend supporting larger instrumental ensembles is that band and orchestra programs remain strong throughout the country. For example, USBands, “a competitive circuit for scholastic band programs,” has a membership of 700 high school marching bands competing in 150 performance opportunities<sup>10</sup> involving 50,000 students across 23 states.<sup>11</sup>

Orchestral ensembles are also well-represented throughout the United States. A 2014 study commissioned by the League of American Orchestras counted 1,224 orchestras across the country, producing 28,000 performances and attracting a total audience of nearly 25 million.<sup>12</sup> In the local context of WBC, the Huntsville Youth Orchestra sustains six youth orchestras, while the neighboring city of Decatur, Alabama (29 miles away), maintains twelve orchestras/ensembles with an enrollment of 300 students.

Far from being an impediment to engagement, an instrumental ministry can provide a point of commonality with community music organizations, attracting musically talented individuals to the church. Furthermore, an orchestra ministry can demonstrate how musical talent can transcend personal gratification, musical perfectionism, or mere entertainment, but instead be used for eternal purposes. Finally, film music continues to feature large scale orchestral ensembles. The symphonic compositions of composers like John Williams, Hans Zimmer, and James Horner cross generational and cultural lines through the influence of a globalized, multi-billion-dollar film industry.

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<sup>10</sup> Youth Education in the Arts, “YEA Employee Handbook, 2019,” accessed December 21, 2019, [https://sweetprocess-static.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/site\\_media/media/19s09/39422/1b13fd3e/YEA\\_Employee\\_Handbook.pdf](https://sweetprocess-static.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/site_media/media/19s09/39422/1b13fd3e/YEA_Employee_Handbook.pdf), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Youth Education in the Arts, “US Bands,” accessed December 21, 2019, <https://yea.org/usbands>.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Giraud Voss, *Orchestra Facts: 2006-2014: A Study of Orchestra Finances and Operations* (Miami: League of American Orchestras, 2016), 4.

In summary, many cultural trends seem to indicate that larger instrumental ensembles continue to have appeal and relevance to current culture. They play an important role in schools, communities, social media, and global entertainment. At the very least, the eclectic diversity of instrumental ensembles proliferating in the internet age should encourage churches to consider options beyond the narrow confines of rhythm section led worship. The iPhone generation shuffles between disparate musical styles like no other generation before it. Although the profusion of streaming options—such as Spotify, YouTube, and Apple Music, for example—allow consumers to narrowcast a highly restricted style of music, such services also allow unprecedented choice in musical diversity. Churches would do well to consider how such instrumental variety can engage their local cultural context and the instrumentally gifted people in their congregations.

### **Rationale**

Based on the contextual factors listed, WBC requires an explicit biblical theology of instrumental ministry, outlining its biblical warrant, function, and relevance. This project focuses on formulating a biblical theology of instrumental ministry and grounding the WBO membership in that theology. What is the biblical view of an instrumental ministry in the context of corporate worship? How should instrumentalists see their role in the context of congregational worship? How should an instrumental ministry express biblical stewardship, model the priesthood of believers, and express full-orbed worship? These are the questions this project will seek to answer.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to provide a biblical theology for the instrumental ministry of the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra, equipping its members to understand the role of instrumental worship in the church.

## **Goals**

Three goals determined the success of this project.

1. Assess the knowledge and affection of WBO members with regard to the place of instrumental music in corporate worship.
2. Develop an eight-session curriculum on the biblical theology of instrumental music.
3. Increase the knowledge and affections of the WBO members with regard to the place of instrumental music in public worship with specific attention to the spiritual formation of the instrumentalists.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the knowledge of WBO members regarding the biblical role of instrumental music in corporate worship. This goal was measured by a survey that utilized twenty-four Likert-scale items to gauge participants' knowledge and required fifteen minutes to complete. The survey also included several multiple choice, short answer, and yes/no questions. Participants chose a four-digit PIN to ensure anonymity as well as to match pre- and post-project surveys. Surveys were offered in an online format through Google Forms. The URL was printed in the orchestra rehearsal order and also distributed via email. The electronic assessment was organized into an online database. The results of the pre-teaching survey determined the areas of emphasis in the curriculum. Development of the curriculum began immediately after the pre-teaching survey was analyzed. This goal was considered successful when at least twenty WBO members completed the survey and the results had been analyzed, yielding a clear picture of participants' current knowledge of the biblical role of instrumental music in corporate worship.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum on a biblical theology of instrumental music to increase the knowledge of biblical instrumental ministry among the members of the WBO. Each session was approximately thirty minutes long. These sessions were taught as part of regular rehearsals and were also available in audio or printed form and accessible from the internet. The curriculum was evaluated by an expert panel using a curriculum evaluation rubric to measure the biblical faithfulness,

teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the course. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of a biblical theology of instrumental ministry among the members of the WBC orchestra. This goal was measured by administering a post-teaching survey, which was used to measure the change in knowledge of a biblical instrumental ministry. Participants took the same pre-teaching survey using the same electronic or paper-based options. The electronic assessment was administered with the online survey mechanism and collated with the paper surveys into a single database. Pre/post-teaching survey scores were aggregated into a final comparison. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-teaching survey scores. As Neil Salkind writes, a t-test for dependent samples “involves a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

Certain terms used throughout this ministry project are defined here to aid the reader’s understanding of the subject.

*Biblical theology.* *Biblical theology* is the synthesis of scriptural thought on a specific theme in light of the overall story of the Bible. Professor of Biblical Theology James Hamilton states, “Biblical theology is to think about the whole story of the Bible. We want to understand the organic development of the Bible’s teaching so that we are

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<sup>13</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

interpreting particular parts of the story in light of the whole.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the whole story of the Bible guides the understanding and comprehension of individual biblical themes, such as redemption or worship, in the context of the entire canon.

*Instrumental worship.* *Instrumental worship* is the use of instruments in the context of corporate worship. Instruments may belong to any of the four classes—percussion, strings, woodwinds or brass. While this project focused on larger instrumental ensembles, any congregational worship using instruments to support and reinforce the event would be considered instrumental worship.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-teaching surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of instrumental worship. The use of a four-digit PIN number ensured anonymity. Second, since the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance, the training was also available online in audio and PDF format.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project only addressed the members of the WBO concerning their knowledge and affection for instrumental worship. Second, the project was confined to an eight-week timeframe, which allowed adequate time to conduct the post-teaching survey after sessions were completed. Finally, this project was carried out in the course of regular WBO rehearsals.

## **Conclusion**

Scripture explicitly endorses instrumental worship through command and example in the Old Testament. While it is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament, it is modeled in Revelation, and Paul’s language can be interpreted to at least imply instrumental worship. In any case, it is never explicitly revoked in the New

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<sup>14</sup> James Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 20.



Testament nor is it treated as a type or shadow of Christ's completed work. As with any other means, instrumental worship may be idolatrous or hypocritical, therefore the Bible also offers warnings against corrupt instrumental worship. The Old Testament prophets specifically condemn hypocritical instrumental worship throughout their writings. God only takes pleasure in worship that is motivated by an authentic thirst for his glory and truth and accompanied by a life of holiness, compassion, and humility. Despite the potential for misuse, Scripture portrays instrumental worship as a desirable means of giving glory to God.

Therefore, this project first develops a theology of instrumental worship by tracing its use throughout Scripture. Whether one considers Miriam's impromptu tambourine choir in Exodus 15, David's extravagant instrumental program in 1 Chronicles 25, or the command to praise God with the sounding of the trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrel, strings, pipe, and cymbals in Psalm 150, the Bible presents instrumental worship as a valid means of expression when God's people gather together. According to Scripture, instrumental worship typically functions in one of three ways: (1) as a desirable intensification of corporate worship, magnifying God's character and celebrating his redemptive plan, (2) as a means of intensifying the message of God to his people, or (3) as an act of worship in its own right.

Second, this project examines how instrumental worship exemplifies a type of "creation worship." In other words, instrumental worship can declare the glory of God in the same way that the heavens declare his glory—through non-verbal praise that reflects a creative, skillful, and glorious God. As creation leads people to worship through the magnificence of its detail, grandeur, and complexity, so too instrumental praise draws them to worship through its detail, grandeur, and complexity that reflects the glory of God.<sup>15</sup> Since instrumental worship is an inherently non-verbal form of communication

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<sup>15</sup> "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1). See also Ps 8:1, Ps 96:13, and Rom 1:20.

(like creation praise), it relies on a scriptural framework to provide comprehensive truth, yet instrumental worship enhances the verbal framework even as it requires it, adding an emotional dimension missing from purely verbal forms of worship.

Third, the project discusses why instrumental worship is important as a fulfillment of the creation mandate in which God commanded mankind to subdue the earth and create culture and beauty. The greatest commandment states, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). Instrumental worship provides an avenue of engaging the whole person intellectually, emotionally, and even physically. Finally, the project discusses how instrumental worship can be a strategic investment in the worship of Whitesburg Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR INSTRUMENTAL WORSHIP

#### **The Scriptural Background of Instrumental Worship**

The Old Testament portrays instrumental music as a means of highlighting God’s glory and proclaiming his acts of salvation, however, instrumental music is first introduced as a significant component of ancient culture in Genesis 4:19-22:

And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jubal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.<sup>1</sup>

The writer frames the development of the arts (Jubal, the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe) with the development of agriculture (Jabal, dwelling in tents and having livestock), and industry (Tubal-cain, forger of all instruments of bronze and iron). Daniel Block states, “Genesis 4: 21 suggests that inventing musical instruments was as significant for the advancement of culture as constructing city walls, domesticating livestock, and discovering uses for metals.”<sup>2</sup> Instrumental music is presented as an important part of the progress of civilization at large, even in the sinful line of Cain. Reggie Kidd remarks, “God gave the believers the song of redemption (through the line of Seth), but, curiously, he gave unbelievers the gift of song (through the line of Cain).”<sup>3</sup> Humanity—both fallen and redeemed—images the creativity of its Creator in developing

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 175, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup> Reggie M. Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 137.

all forms of artistic expression, and the Bible presents instrumental music as a common expression of corporate celebration.

Hundreds of years later, for example, in Genesis 31:27, Laban implies that instrumental music was integral to family celebrations: “Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre?” Instrumental music appears as a cultural expression of joy and communal celebration, marking important events. Professor Harold Best says, “This is a world in which people have, in countless ways, celebrated their existence in sound.”<sup>4</sup> As people begin to celebrate God and his redemptive work, they naturally turn to instrumental music as a means of celebration, as seen in Exodus.

### **Instrumental Worship in the Exodus**

Instrumental worship first appears in the context of spontaneous corporate worship in Miriam’s Song:

For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.” (Exod 15:19-21)

Miriam’s Song seems to function as a recapitulation or an antiphonal chorus to Moses’ Song, which is presented in verses 1-18. As Moses leads the nation in celebrating God’s miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians, Miriam and the women of Israel respond by grabbing their timbrels and accompanying the festivities.<sup>5</sup> Several points bear

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<sup>4</sup> Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Hamilton explains, The Hebrew word *tōp* (“timbrel”; LXX, tympanon ; Vulg., tympanum ) refers to some kind of handheld drum made from animal skin stretched over a circular frame of metal or wood. Normally, it would be held in the left hand and struck with the palm or fingers of the right hand. It was used at victory celebrations (Exod 15:20; Jdg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6; Ps 68:25 [26]); as a part of prophetic ecstatic worship (1 Sam. 10:5); at yearly festivals (Ps 81:2-3 [3-4]; Isa 30:29-32); at moments of thanksgiving to God for his benefits (Jer 31:4); and even at parties that can last late into the night (Job 21:12; Isa 5:12;

mentioning. First, this is the earliest recorded instance of God’s people using instruments in biblical worship. Second, no official sanction or command is given for this outpouring of instrumental praise. It is a natural means of worship, along with the singing and dancing. Third, using instruments in this manner was obviously very common since “all the women” grabbed their tambourines without hesitation. They obviously did not have to spend much time finding their instruments, in spite of the hasty exodus from Egypt.

Finally, the use of instrumental worship at this particular event is rather significant. The Exodus is *the* singular redemptive act of the Old Testament, the paradigmatic display of Yahweh’s *hesed* love to his chosen people.<sup>6</sup> Moses sings, “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode (15:13).” The Old Testament writers continually rehearse the events of the Exodus as a reminder of God’s merciful redemption, his covenantal claims on his people, and his righteous justice. Graeme Goldsworthy describes it so:

The song of Moses is not a vindictive gloating over the Egyptians, but rather an account of what God has done to show his covenant faithfulness (Hebrew: *hesed*, Ex 15:13). . . . Redemption as a release from slavery or from a position of misfortune now becomes one of the most significant themes in the Bible. . . . We shall see also the repetition of the idea of the exodus as the pattern of redemption. There is this first exodus from Egypt, a second involving the return of the captives from Babylon in the sixth century B. C. and then the true exodus in which Jesus takes his people out of the captivity to sin and death. . . . Redemption is God’s act of releasing his people from an alien power, and of bringing them to freedom so that they can live as his people according to the covenant promises.<sup>7</sup>

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24:8). They were also used in exuberant worship (2 Sam 6:5; 1 Chron 13:8; Pss 149:3; 150:4. (Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 237)

<sup>6</sup> Strong’s Concordance defines the *hesed* love of God as His “lovingkindness; steadfast love; grace; mercy; faithfulness; goodness; devotion,” in particular the covenantal love He displays towards His people. James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 93.

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 137.

In the most significant redemptive event of the Old Testament, instrumental worship makes its first appearance and clearly has the tacit approval of Yahweh. No express command is given or required for its use; its legitimacy is assumed. Instrumental music is taken for granted as an expression of worship, celebrating God's redemptive acts on behalf of his covenant people. Given their recent emancipation from slavery, its simplicity is not surprising. At this point in their story, the nation of Israel has had little or no opportunity to develop an artistic culture, musical or otherwise. Yet what little artistic culture they possessed is used for the glory of God. Instrumental worship seems to follow this pattern throughout the Scripture: it flourishes to the degree in which the means are available. As the Hebrew culture grows in sophistication and resources, so does the musical culture, including instrumental worship.

### **Instrumental Worship in the Tabernacle and Temple**

Shortly after the introduction of instrumental worship in the Song of Miriam, God instructs Moses to build the Tabernacle. God's instructions include the fashioning of two silver trumpets (Num 10). While their use as signaling devices for moving the camp and calling to arms is highlighted in most commentaries, they were also a means of celebrating the lordship of Yahweh in battle and worship.<sup>8</sup> Numbers 10 states:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp. And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. (vv. 1-3)

And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets. The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations. And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets

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<sup>8</sup> Such instruments were common in this time period. John Walton writes, "Tubular flared trumpets were used in this period in military as well as ritual contexts. This is depicted on Egyptian reliefs as well as evidenced by actual instruments found, for example, in the tomb of King Tut (a silver trumpet nearly two feet long). John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthew, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 14.

over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I am the Lord your God. (vv.8-10)

In contrast to the tacit approval of timbrels in Miriam's Song, Yahweh explicitly commissions the construction and use of the silver trumpets; however, only the ordained sons of Aaron, the priests, are allowed to play these divinely ordained instruments. In battle, they serve not only as a call to arms, but also as a call to prayer, reminding Israel's armies that God alone is responsible for defeating their enemies and conquering the promised land. In worship, the trumpets are played during the offerings of atonement and the sacrificial peace offerings. They serve as a joyful expression of gratitude for God's mercy and as a reminder to the nation that Yahweh is their sovereign Lord and they are his people. Instrumental worship functions as a reminder of God's covenantal authority, protection, and love for his people.

The introduction of divinely sanctioned instrumental worship at this point in the narration of Numbers is significant. Chapter 10 concludes what one commentary terms the two Sinai cycles. Sinai cycle A (Num 1:1-6:27) is the census and consecration of the Israel, mainly dealing with the role and duties of the Levitical priesthood, while Sinai Cycle B (Num 7:1-10:10) offers instructions for the Tabernacle, festivals, and sacrifices. The two cycles outline a means of sanctification for the nation through the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system.<sup>9</sup> As such, the introduction of trumpets at the end of the second cycle provides an exclamation point. The trumpets are introduced as an aural cue, reminding the Israelites of the preceding material. Old Testament Professor Dennis Cole remarks concerning this passage:

It describes the time when the people would be in the land, battling against their enemies for occupation and control of the territory God had granted them. There they would celebrate the bounty of God's blessing and the wonder of his salvation activities of the past. Whole burnt offerings for consecrative atonement and peace offerings for community celebration were accompanied by the long blast of the

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<sup>9</sup> The first section of the book of Numbers contains five cycles of material, two devoted to the sanctification of the people before leaving Mount Sinai (chaps. 1-6, 7-10a), and three devoted to the rebellion and judgment of the nation after leaving Mount Sinai (chaps. 10b-15; 16-19; 20-25). Dennis R. Cole, *Numbers*, New American Commentary, vol. 3B (Nashville: B & H, 2000), 67.

silver trumpets during the pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Pentecost (Shavuoth), and tabernacles (Booths), and during the monthly New Moon rites.

In the context of battle, the trumpets served as a prayer by which the covenant relationship between God and Israel was invoked, and thus they reminded soldiers that God remembers and delivers his people. The covenant themes of remembrance, deliverance, and blessing provide continuity with other portions of the Pentateuch.

The concluding phrase of the Sinai cycles, “I am Yahweh your God,” sets forth in profoundly plain terms the sovereignty of God over the nation.<sup>10</sup>

The trumpets support Israel’s covenantal celebration of (1) Yahweh’s protection from potential enemies; (2) Yahweh’s mercy displayed through the sacrificial system; and (3) Yahweh’s sovereignty over their lives. Instrumental worship has progressed from Miriam’s impromptu praise celebration to a divinely sanctioned celebration of covenant remembrance embedded in Tabernacle worship.

Scripture provides just enough clues from Moses to David to indicate that instrumental worship continued through the time of Joshua, Judges, and Saul. In Joshua 6, Yahweh instructs Joshua to sound the trumpets in conquering Jericho. Although the seven trumpets mentioned are shofars (ram’s horn trumpets), their function is similar to that of the silver trumpets. They reminded the people that God will win the battle on their behalf, not because of anything they have done.

Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him. (Josh 6:4-5)

In Judges 3:27, Ehud uses a trumpet according to the Numbers 10 exhortation, and Gideon does the same in Judges 6:34. After his victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:34), Jephthah’s daughter greets him with “tambourines and dances,” echoing the Song of Miriam. Samuel tells Saul that he will meet a company of prophets “coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying” (1 Sam

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<sup>10</sup> Cole, *Numbers*, 143-44.



10:5). Saul also blows the trumpet in the manner of Numbers 10 in 1 Samuel 13:3.<sup>11</sup> In 1 Samuel 18:6, the women come “out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments,” emulating the impromptu worship of Miriam’s Song. Each example illustrates the continual use of instrumental praise from the time of Moses, but none of them prepare the reader for the expansion of instrumental worship initiated by David.

### **Davidic Worship**

From the beginning of his reign, David seems to have systematically implemented the instrumental resources of his day in service of corporate worship. In his first, ill-fated attempt to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 13, “David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets” (v. 8). While this particular instrumental processional ended in disaster, it does not affect David’s methodical integration of instruments into the national liturgy.<sup>12</sup> By the time he successfully brought the ark into the nation’s new capital of Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 15, David had not only organized a team of 800 Levites to lead worship (1 Chron 15:5-10), but had also officially added lyres, harps, and cymbals to the silver trumpets from Numbers 10:1-10. The Chronicler mentions the use of instruments five times in the narration (1 Chron 15:19-21, 28; 16:5-6, 42), highlighting their role in the national celebration.

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<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Saul and the Israelites did not respond to the trumpet blast by trusting Yahweh to “save them from their enemies” (the intended outcome of Num 10:9); instead, they fixated on the fact that they had “become a stench” to the more powerful Philistine army (13:4-7), and therefore fled the promised land (1 Sam 13:4-7). What was supposed to be a call to worship, a call to trust in Yahweh for victory, became a signal to retreat, achieving the quite the opposite effect of its original covenantal purpose.

<sup>12</sup> David’s first attempt to move the ark ended in disaster because he neglected God’s explicit commands on handling the ark, not because of anything to do with his instrumental innovations. David admitted his mistake later in 1 Chron 15:13: “Because you [the Levites] did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule.”

David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy (1 Chron 15:16).

The singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound bronze cymbals; Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to play harps according to Alamoth; but Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah were to lead with lyres according to the Sheminith. Chenaniah, leader of the Levites in music, should direct the music, for he understood it. Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, should blow the trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. (1 Chronicles 15:19-24)

So, all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres. (1 Chron 15:28)

Once the dedication ceremony is over, David appointed a permanent staff of Levites to minister before the ark of God with singing and instrumental worship.

Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God. (1 Chron 16:5-6)

With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and expressly named to give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever. Heman and Jeduthun had trumpets and cymbals for the music and instruments for sacred song. (1 Chron 16:41-42)

The first item of significance in 1 Chronicles 15-16 is that David reinstated the Mosaic sacrificial system on a national scale. The sacrificial system had been neglected during the time of the Judges; therefore, David initiated a nationwide revival of Israel's covenantal rituals. The second item of significance is that David methodically integrated an extensive instrumental program into corporate worship. The number and variety of instruments involved was unprecedented at this point in Israel's liturgy. David transforms instrumental worship from an impromptu accompaniment into a highly structured team organized by instrument and directed by skilled leaders. Chenaniah is appointed to direct the ensemble, "for he understood it" (1 Chron 15:22). In other words, the performance is not left up to chance, but is led by someone with training and skill. Catholic theologian Scott Hahn describes David's introduction of instrumental worship as

something radically new. . . . The most obvious difference was his introduction of liturgical music and the singing of psalms. The Mosaic order of sacrifice basically involved priests offering sacrifices for the people in silence, except for the blowing of trumpets before the ark (Num. 10:8-10). David established a new ministry of praise and thanksgiving in song and entrusted this ministry to the Levites. For the first time in Israel's history, psalms of thanksgiving were sung in the sanctuary, with horns, cymbals, harps, and lyres.<sup>13</sup>

In the larger canonical context, David's instrumental program forms a logical expansion of the role of the silver trumpets from Numbers 10: to support the celebration of Yahweh's covenantal protection, mercy, and sovereignty over his people. While only the priests could play the silver trumpets, David expands the instrumental pool by allowing the Levites to join instrumental worship using harp, lyres, cymbals, and shofars. First Chronicles 16:4 sums up the purposes of Davidic worship ministry: "Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke [petition], to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel." Professor of Divinity Allan Ross explains the implications of this summary verse:

The first infinitive, "to remind" (lehazkir [s.v. zakar]) fits the lament psalms, because in them the people reminded the LORD of their dilemmas and petitioned for intervention. The petition frequently called God to hear, to see, or to remember his servants (e.g., Pss. 13:3; 132). . . . The second infinitive, "to acknowledge" (lehodot [s.v. yadah]; related to the word "thanksgiving," *todah*), is the key word for a declarative praise psalm in which the worshipper declared what God had done (e.g., Ps. 118:1, 21). . . . The third infinitive, "to praise" (lehallel [s.v. Mal]) refers to the psalm of pure praise to God, the descriptive praise or hymn (e.g., Pss. 33; 113). . . . So the singers and musicians were assigned the ministry of presenting or accompanying the various expressions of the faith of the people.<sup>14</sup>

The Psalm of dedication (1 Chron 16:8-36) provides the context for Ross's interpretation of verse 16:4: (1) God's salvific works are invoked as a basis for worship (16:8-13), (2) they remember his covenantal agreement as a basis for his claim on the nation and for their claim on the land (16:14-22); (3) they praise him for his salvation, character, and sovereign reign (16:23-33); and (4) they thank him for his covenantal love (16:34-36). Verses 41-42 integrate instruments into the liturgy: "With them were Heman

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<sup>13</sup> Scott W. Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 122.

<sup>14</sup> Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 255-56.

and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and expressly named to give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever. Heman and Jeduthun had trumpets and cymbals for the music and instruments for sacred song.” David’s instrumental innovations follow the pattern set with the commissioning of the silver trumpets in Numbers 10: instrumental worship acts as a means of celebrating Yahweh’s covenantal protection, mercy, and sovereignty over his people.

First Chronicles 25 further underlines the role of instruments as a means of supporting worship, stating that “the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun . . . prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals” (v. 1)” “the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah . . . prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the Lord (v. 3), and that the sons of Heman exalted God, “with cymbals, harps, and lyres for the service of the house of God” (v. 6). Instrumental worship was seen as a ministry supporting the prophetic duties of the priests in the house of the Lord. Martin Selman, from Spurgeon’s College in London, explains,

The musicians’ task is unexpectedly described as prophesying (v. 1, cf. vv. 2-3). The context indicates that this activity involved the playing of musical instruments, and that it was carried out under the king’s supervision (vv. 2, 6). Both features are unusual in Israelite prophecy. Two explanations of this Levitical prophecy are possible. Either they supplied messages direct from God in the manner of the classical prophets, for which the Levite Jabaziel (2 Chr. 20:14-17) provides an obvious analogy (cf. GNB, “to proclaim God’s messages”). Or their praise was itself seen as ‘prophecy’ in that it proclaimed God’s word with God’s authority.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of which interpretation is preferred, the use of instruments in the context of Temple worship is described as “service,” “ministry,” “exaltation,” or “prophecy” before God or before the ark of God. Accompanied by instruments, the Levites proclaimed God’s Word to the people for their edification, and as an encouragement to worship. The lyrics could have been divinely inspired in the moment or (more likely) taken from appropriate passages in the Pentateuch, Miriam’s Song, or Moses’

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<sup>15</sup> Martin J. Selman, *1 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 246.

Song, for example. David's growing portfolio of Psalms was certainly included in the prophetic repertoire, as illustrated by 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. The use of instruments served to enhance the proclamation and emotional impact of the prophetic utterances by Heman and his company of musicians. David developed the instrumental program to such a degree that by the time he passed the kingdom to Solomon, he decreed that "4,000 shall offer praises to the Lord with the instruments that I have made for praise" (1 Chr 23:5), fully 16 percent of the entire contingent of 24,000 Levites. David and Solomon even played a role in the construction of the instruments used by the Levites (1 Kgs 10:12; 1 Chr 23:5; 2 Chr 7:6, 29:26-27, Neh 12:36). Instrumental worship grew from an impromptu tambourine accompaniment into a vibrant, highly developed component of covenantal worship for the nation, deeply intertwined in petitioning, thanking, and praising the Lord, the God of Israel.

Second Chronicles 5-7 provides a vivid illustration of how David's large-scale musical organization functioned at nation-wide Temple festivals. At the dedication of Solomon's Temple, one hundred and twenty priests play trumpets (not lamb ram's horns but similar to the silver trumpets commissioned for the Tabernacle)<sup>16</sup> and accompany a massive Levitical choir, many of whom also play cymbals, harps, and lyres. God responds to Israel's outpouring of sanctified praise with his Shekinah glory coming down, interrupting the proceedings and preventing the priests from performing their God-ordained duties (vv. 13-14). The chorus of covenantal love, "He is good and his love endures forever," resounds through Jerusalem, accompanied by an unbridled cacophony (at least by twentieth-century standards) of instrumental music. Hahn describes the event:

The Davidic liturgy is carefully arranged and orchestrated to offer fitting worship to God, to render to God what is God's due. This worship is not a ritual performance in which one mechanically discharges a debt to God. The liturgy is ordered in such a way as to bring worshipers into communion with the living God. . . . In the liturgy,

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<sup>16</sup> Walton explains, "The trumpets are not the ram's-horn trumpets that are referred to in other contexts. Tubular flared trumpets were used in this period in military as well as ritual contexts." Walton, Matthew, and Chavalas *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 428-29.

the people share in God’s Sabbath rest and commemorate both his primordial act of creation and his separation of Israel to be his people, a kingdom of priests. This was symbolized by the cloud that filled the temple and the fire that came down from heaven to accept Solomon’s sacrifices. It is the promise of God himself—that if his people seek him with a humble heart, they will find him.<sup>17</sup>

Hahn’s description frames the importance of this national festival: Yahweh showed himself to be a loving, faithful, and sovereign ruler, therefore His people responded to His munificence with every means available. Yahweh’s extravagant covenantal love motivates the most extravagant choral and instrumental worship the Israelites could muster. The nation responded according to Deuteronomy 6:5, with all their heart and with all their soul, and with all their might. The effectiveness of the worship was not due to the size and sophistication of the worship team, but due to their diligent, yet humble spiritual preparation. Humble spiritual preparation did not preclude a prodigious response, in fact, it motivated such a response. Verse 11 informs the reader that after preparations had been carefully made, “all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves.” The chronicler also emphasizes that the priests and Levites sang and played “in unison . . . with one voice (2 Chron 5:13 NASB). Simply put, the performance was well-prepared, and the musicians were well-rehearsed, singularly focused on the purpose of declaring Yahweh’s covenantal love. The spiritual preparations matched the physical and musical preparations for worship. Martin Selman observes, “The Chronicler clearly intends this to be seen as an example to be followed. When God’s people set themselves apart for him to express heartfelt worship and praise, God will surely respond with some sign of his presence.”<sup>18</sup>

Second Chronicles 5 offers a biblical template for the role of modern church orchestra ministries. Scripture demands excellence in worship preparation, but the expectation of God’s presence and blessing is not focused on the lavishness of the

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<sup>17</sup> Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 335-36.

musical offering but on the extravagance of God's character. The worship centers on the faithful lovingkindness of Yahweh, which motivates a profound gratitude, a humble devotion, and an earnest spiritual preparation from the sanctified musicians. God will bless an orchestra ministry guided by such principles.

The practices of 1 and 2 Chronicles continue throughout the Old Testament. Whenever the nation of Israel experiences revival, instrumental worship seems to be reinvigorated as well. King Asa, for example, reinstates godly worship in lavish revival services, where the nation "swore an oath to the Lord with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath for they had sworn with all their heart and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around" (2 Chron 15:14-15). Instrumental worship accompanies a vow of faithfulness to the Lord, and He blesses the nation for their wholehearted devotion.

In 2 Chronicles 20, when Jehoshaphat and the nation look to Yahweh to defeat the invading nations of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir (v. 22), they experience a miraculous victory. After collecting the plunder from the defeated army, they return to Jerusalem and enter into the Temple of the Lord with harps and lyres and trumpets, rejoicing in what the Lord had done for them (vv. 27-28). Instrumental worship functions on two levels: (1) as an evidence or expression of their devotion to God and (2) as a means of intensifying their corporate worship with every available resource. It signals their wholehearted gratitude to their Deliverer, mirroring Miriam's impromptu instrumental worship at the Red Sea.

In 2 Chronicles 29, after a series of reforms and a cleansing of the Temple, Hezekiah reinstates instrumental worship following the practice of David and Solomon. Second Chronicles 29:27-28 reads,

Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly

worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

Selman remarks,

The musical praise returned to the standards set by David (vv. 25-26, 30). David's instruments (v. 26) and words (v. 30) were revived, as were the words of prophets who were contemporary with him (v. 25). Hezekiah uses instrumental worship in a manner similar to Solomon, in order to magnify the prophetic impact of the corporate worship.<sup>19</sup>

The passage echoes the dedication of Solomon's Temple in highlighting the extensive spiritual and physical preparations which took place for sixteen days preceding the worship service. The author also makes a point of mentioning that they used "the instruments of David" (v. 27) and that they sang "with the words of David and of Asaph" (v. 30), underlining the connection to Davidic worship. Similar to the dedication of the Temple, instrumental worship serves to intensify the proclamation of God's Word and magnify the response of the people.<sup>20</sup>

After the return from the Babylonian exile, Ezra reinstates worship "according to the directions of King David of Israel" (Ezra 3:10), using trumpets and cymbals, and singing the same chorus of God's *hesed* love which had been sung centuries earlier at Solomon's Temple. Once the Israelites complete the wall, Nehemiah holds a dedication ceremony that features more instrumentalists (cymbals, harps, and lyres, [Neh 12:27]) as well as an antiphonal choir: "Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks" (Neh 12:31). They march around the wall in opposite directions before meeting at the house of God, where they are joined by trumpets (vv. 40-41). Like Solomon's Temple dedication, this event must have been quite the spectacle, which should remind modern worship ministries that organizing worship

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<sup>19</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 239.

<sup>20</sup> Josiah also instigates a major national revival in 2 Chron 35. Although instrumental worship is not explicitly mentioned, the passage says, "The musicians, the descendants of Asaph, were in the places prescribed by the David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer" (v. 15). Since these same men oversaw "the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres, and cymbals (v. 1), it would be reasonable to assume that instrumental worship played a role in Josiah's revival as well.



with a sense of beauty and grandeur has scriptural warrant, as long as the motivation and focus remain on the Lord. Ezra apparently did keep the proper priorities, as the writer notes that he did everything “according to the command of David and his son Solomon” (v. 45).

The narratives of the Old Testament seem to indicate that whenever the nation of Israel has the means to use instruments in worship, it is a welcome addition in a wide variety of worship settings. For example, God’s acceptance of instrumental worship is so taken for granted that the Chronicler does not inform the reader of God’s explicit approval of David’s instrumental innovations until 2 Chronicles 29—forty-two chapters after their introduction in 1 Chronicles 15. In 2 Chronicles 29:25, the Chronicler reveals that David’s large-scale instrumental program was not a matter of personal taste nor innovative thinking, but that it was according to an express command, “from the Lord through his prophets.” Yahweh directly sanctioned David’s large-scale use of instruments as a method of worship.

While the scope of instrumental worship waxes and wanes throughout the Old Testament (depending on the state of the nation), the purpose builds on the role of the silver trumpets from Numbers 10:1-10. First, it serves as reminder of the covenantal redemption, mercy, and authority of Yahweh over his people. Building on these qualities, it also provides an intensification of the message of Yahweh to his people, the “prophetic” quality highlighted in 1 Chronicles 25. In addition, instrumental praise appears as a symptom of authentic worship at times of divine deliverance and revival. Instrumental worship results from creative people of God submitting their talents to the service of God in a manner which amplifies the praise of God, highlights the message of God, and edifies the people of God. While God’s explicit approval of instrumental worship is only mentioned twice in the historical narratives of the Old Testament (the commissioning of the silver trumpets, and Hezekiah’s revival), His implicit approval is assumed. The Psalms,

however, recommend, model, and command the use of instrumental worship for God’s glory.

### **Instrumental Worship in the Psalms**

John Calvin (1509-1564) describes the Psalms as “an Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul: for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror . . . all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the Psalms demonstrate how God’s people should articulate every possible emotion in a biblical manner, and they do so to an instrumental soundtrack. Instrumental worship is either implied, recommended, or modelled throughout Psalms. What begins as a simple recommendation in Psalm 4—“with stringed instruments”—culminates in a symphonic crescendo in Psalm 150, using trumpets, lutes, haps, tambourines, strings, pipes, and loud clashing cymbals—every class of instrument. Instruments underscore the soundtrack of praise reverberating in the Psalms.

The language of the Psalms is permeated with the implied assumption of instrumental worship. For example, the Hebrew term *zamar*, appears forty-two times in the Psalms and is commonly translated as “sing” or “praise,” or “sing praises.” Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, however, explains that the term denotes the use of instruments “to touch the strings or parts of a musical instrument, i.e. Play upon it; to make music, accompanied by the voice; hence to celebrate in song and music.”<sup>22</sup> At least sixteen psalms contain no obvious references to instrumental usage, but strongly infer it through the use of the Hebrew term *zamar*.<sup>23</sup> Psalm 59, for example, contains no mention of

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<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), 1:23.

<sup>22</sup> Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Pss 7, 9, 18, 21, 27, 30, 59, 66, 68, 75, 101, 104, 105, 135, 138, and 146.

instruments, but concludes with the commonly translated phrase, “I will sing praises to You” (v. 17 ESV, NASB). A more accurate rendition of the Hebrew would be, “I will make music to You” (sometimes used by the NIV translation), indicating all types of music production, not merely singing. Similarly, the related Hebrew term “*mizmor*” (used fifty-seven times in the Psalms) and usually translated as “psalm,” is defined as “instrumental music; by implication, a poem set to notes—psalm,” according to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.<sup>24</sup> Fuller Theological Seminary Professor John Goldingay supports this interpretation, explaining,

(mizmôr) Zāmar (make music) and its derived nouns refer more to the making of music than specifically to the singing of songs (šîr), to melodies rather than words (e.g., 33:2), or to singing with instruments rather than a cappella. . . . While the OT uses the verb itself only of worship music, the more general use of the derived noun suggests that zāmar would also be the general term for making music.<sup>25</sup>

Ross offers a similar view: “The word commonly used for a ‘psalm’ (mizmor, s.v. zamar) indicates that a psalm is a poetic composition to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.”<sup>26</sup> Instrumental worship saturates the Psalms explicitly through the examples and commands, but also implicitly through the language chosen by the authors.

Fully half of the Psalms can be ascribed to David, portrayed by Old Testament writers as a skilled instrumentalist and singer.<sup>27</sup> As he was the chief advocate of Israel’s instrumental ministry, it is hardly surprising that the Psalms directly reference instrumental worship over twenty times. Eight Psalms call for instrumental accompaniment in the

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<sup>24</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 153.

<sup>25</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Downers Grove, IL: Baker, 2006), 1:592.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 256.

<sup>27</sup> David is listed in 73 Psalm titles, and ascribed to two more in the New Testament: Ps 2 in Acts 4:25 and Ps 95 in Heb 4:7. Second Sam 23:1 describes David as “the sweet singer of Israel” (NASV).

superscripts,<sup>28</sup> eight Psalms model the use of instruments as part of worship,<sup>29</sup> and six Psalms command instrumental praise as a means of worship.<sup>30</sup> The Psalms do not present instrumental ministry as an afterthought or an enjoyable option, but as a vibrant, integral, and highly desirable component of worship.

A survey of the Psalms provides insight into the scope of instrumental practice which Yahweh encouraged in the worship of his people. Eight psalms recommend instruments in the superscripts: Psalms 4, 5, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, and 76. While seven of the eight psalms recommend strings, Psalm 5 breaks the pattern by recommending flutes, illustrating the potential for variety. Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, and 67 are desperate prayers of deliverance, beginning with phrases like “answer me when I call” (Ps 4:1), “O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger” (6:1), and “hear my cry, O God” (61:1). While instrumental worship is typically associated with joyful celebration, in six of the psalms, the context is persecution, agony, or severe need. In Psalm 61, the psalmist characterizes making music as an integral component of fulfilling his obligations to the Lord, saying, “I will ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day” (v. 8). Keeping in mind that the first part of the verse could be rendered, “I will ever make music to your name,” Goldingay comments, “The music is at least as integral to the fulfillment of the promise as the offering.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the psalmist considers “making music”—both vocal and instrumental—as a vital component of demonstrating his commitment to his God on an ongoing, daily basis. His instrumental abilities are devoted to expressing his petitions

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<sup>28</sup> Pss 4, 5, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, and 76. Also, the superscript to Ps 12 could be read as a recommendation for instrumental accompaniment. The NASB makes this option clear in its translation: “For the choir director: upon an eight-stringed lyre [according to The Sheminith].” “According to the Sheminith” may be instructions for instrumental accompaniment, but the meaning is not certain.

<sup>29</sup> Pss 47, 49, 57, 68, 71, 92, 108, and 144.

<sup>30</sup> Pss 33, 81, 98, 147, 149, and 150.

<sup>31</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 2:354-55.

to God, reminding himself of his commitment to God's law, and rehearsing God's promises on his behalf. Instrumental worship is not an ornamental accoutrement, but a valuable asset serving the psalmist's pursuit of a godly life.

The last two psalms recommending instrumental accompaniment in the superscripts are Psalms 67 and 76. The former is a prayer for God's blessing, and the latter is a meditation on the awesome power and judgment of God. Although the instrumental variety in these eight psalms is limited, the emotional territory is broad, covering petition, hurt, anguish, persecution, blessing, commitment, humility, awe, and contemplation. Instruments are presented as a desirable avenue of expressing thoughts, feelings, and devotion to God.

While the previously mentioned Psalms recommend instrumental accompaniment in the superscripts, multiple Psalms either model or command instrumental usage in the lyrics. Beginning with Psalm 33, instrumental worship moves from a recommended accompaniment to an explicit command. Verses 2 and 3 read, "Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts." The psalm does not present instrumental worship as a mere support to vocal worship, but as a means of worship. It exhorts worshipers to use their voices and instruments in celebrating Yahweh's character (vv. 4-5), his Lordship over creation (vv. 6-9), his sovereignty over the nations (vv. 10-12), his watch-care over mankind (vv. 13-17), and his salvation for those who trust Him (vv. 18-22). It commands the use of instruments as a means of presenting God's character and redemptive plan. Goldingay explains,

Psalm 33 begins, "Resound . . . praise . . . confess Yhwh with the lyre, make music to him with the ten-stringed harp, sing him a new song, play well with a shout." The opening to this praise psalm makes only one reference to words (though it will go on to counterbalance that); sound is at the heart of praise, both noise and music, both singing and instruments.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3, *Israel's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 173.

God takes pleasure when his people voice their praise and their prayers, their suffering, and their joy, with instruments.

While Psalm 33 commands instrumental worship, Psalms 43 and 47 model it in contrasting situations. Psalm 43 provides the conclusion to Psalm 42, in which the psalmist offers an anguished meditation on his separation from Yahweh. After expressing an intense desire to meet with God, he promises in verse 4 to “go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.” The Hebrew word for “praise” in this instance is *yadah*, which is defined by Strong’s as “to give thanks, laud, praise . . . this verb is an important word in the language of worship . . . found most frequently in the Book of Psalms (some 70 times).”<sup>33</sup> The psalmist characterizes his use of the lyre as a significant means of demonstrating his gratitude and joy in God’s sovereignty and presence in his life.

In contrast, Psalm 47 begins by announcing Yahweh’s sovereign kingship with a great fanfare of applause, shouting, loud songs, and the sound of trumpet. Goldingay points out that verses 6-7, which are typically translated as “sing praises to God, sing praises, . . . sing praises with a psalm,” would be better translated as “Make music for our God, make music, make music for our king, make music . . . make music with understanding.”<sup>34</sup> The psalmist is therefore encouraging an entire range of musical expression (not merely singing) with these two verses. Furthermore, the second half of verse 7 directs the reader to make music with “understanding” (Goldingay) or with a “skillful psalm” (NASB), or with “a song of wisdom” (CSB). Biblical praise embraces a full-orbed range of musical expression, from the emotional, abstract outbursts of cacophonous clapping and raucous shouting—Hebrew “*ruwa*, to raise a shout, give a

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<sup>33</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 2:116.

blast,”<sup>35</sup>—to the more intellectual actions of skillful singing and playing with “wisdom.” The psalmist foreshadows Paul’s example in 1 Corinthians 14:15, when he writes, “I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.” The scriptural view of “making music” involves the body, the intellect, and the affections, and instrumental worship plays a persistent role in engaging the whole person in the Psalms.

Psalm 49 similarly combines intense emotion with intellectual meditation as the psalmist soberly reflects on the fate of the wicked, to the sound of the lyre (v. 4). As the Psalmist contemplates the deep paradox of why the wicked seem to prosper and flourish, his instrumental accompaniment seems to either serve as an aid to focusing his mind, a means of amplifying the emotional weight of his thoughts, or perhaps both. Instrumental accompaniment facilitates the processing of emotional and intellectual dilemmas and communication of wisdom. Furthermore, the superscript recommends the psalm “to the choirmaster” (ESV) or more literal “the chief musician.” Strong’s Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary states that the title “refers to the One who can bring harmony to all, the Coming One, the Messiah, the Chief Musician unto Whom all tune their songs and instruments.”<sup>36</sup> While the psalm may be used for solitary meditation, the psalmist’s primary intent is that it will be used in a corporate worship setting led by choir and instruments. The choral and orchestral setting functions as a pedagogical aid for the whole congregation as they meditate on the wisdom of the psalm and tune their hearts to the Chief Musician.

Psalm 57 begins as a petitionary prayer but culminates in a confirmation of God’s steadfast love using the harp and the lyre in verse 8. While most translations render verse 7 as “I will sing and make melody” or “I will sing praises” (ESV, NASB), a more accurate rendering would be “I will sing and make music” (NIV) derived again from the

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<sup>35</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 260.

<sup>36</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 190.

Hebrew word *zamar*. Since the same Hebrew term is used in verse 9b, it could easily be translated as “I will make music for you among the nations.” Therefore, the specific use of the harp and the lyre is framed by a general exhortation to “make music (v. 7, 9),” with a variety of vocal and instrumental resources, similar to Psalm 47. God intended Israel to be a “light for the nations” (Isa 42:6), and in this psalm, instrumental worship undergirds Israel’s proclamation of God’s character to the pagan kingdoms. In other words, the Psalmist presents instrumental praise not only as a means of worship but also as a means of witness to the surrounding nations.

Psalm 68 begins by exhorting God’s people to rejoice in their victorious God: “Sing to God, make music to his name (Hebrew: *zamar*)” (v. 4), and concludes by exhorting the “kingdoms of the earth” (v. 32) to do the same. The two exhortations to sing and make music frame the demonstration of such worship in verses 24-26. The psalmist portrays a procession of God’s people marching to the Temple, singing and playing their instruments, celebrating an awesome, triumphant God who “rides in the heavens” (v. 33), yet also is a “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows” (v. 5). God’s righteous conquest and deep compassion are celebrated with a marching ensemble of singers, instrumentalists, and percussion (timbrels or tambourines, v. 25).

In Psalm 71, the psalmist demonstrates the comprehensive nature of worship and “making music.” After twenty-one verses of praise and petition, the Psalmist summarizes his worship in verses 22-24, illustrating how emotions, intellect, and will are joined together in praise:

I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises (make music) to you with the lyre, O holy one of Israel. My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed. And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long, for they have been put to shame and disappointed who sought to do me hurt (Ps 71:22-24).

The psalmist “confesses” (Heb: *yadah*) with the harp, meditating on God’s faithfulness (Heb: *emeth*, firmness or truthfulness) with his mind. He “makes music” (*zamar*) to him with the lyre, he shouts for joy with his lips, and again “makes music”



(*zamar*) with his inmost being (his soul), and, finally, he talks all day long about God’s righteous help. For the Psalmist, worship involves his whole being and instrumental worship plays a valuable role in declaring unreserved praise to a redeeming God.

In Psalm 81, the psalmist decrees instrumental worship: “For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob” (v. 4). The Israelites are commanded to celebrate their covenantal deliverance from Egypt with the tambourine, harp, lyre, and ram’s horn. While many translations use the word “trumpet” in verse 3 (which would be *chatsotsrah* in Hebrew), the original term is *shophar*, the ram’s horn. The ram’s horn was used to give signals in battle, to call the people to worship, and also to sound a warning. In this psalm, it assumes the role of the silver trumpets of Moses: marking the beginnings of the three annual festivals, and the beginning of the month.<sup>37</sup> The psalmist combines multiple instrumental cues from Israel’s past: the tambourines evoke Miriam’s song at the crossing of the Red Sea, the *shofars* remind them of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the victory over Jericho, the function of the *shophars* brings to mind the Tabernacle worship instituted by Moses, and the harps and lyres suggest the Temple worship of David and Solomon. The entire ensemble joins together in a mandatory celebration of God’s redemptive work, and a solemn admonition to Israel not to harden their hearts like they did at Meribah (v. 7). Instrumental worship amplifies the worship celebrations and reinforces the warnings of God’s Word.

Psalm 92 is the only Psalm specifically designated for use on the Sabbath—and it models instrumental worship. Verse 1b could be translated as “to make music for your name, O most High (NIV)” instead of the more common “to sing praises to your name, O Most High” (ESV). Verses 3 and 4 bear out this interpretation as the psalmist declares God’s *hesed* love with instruments—the lute, harp, and lyre in verse 3—before singing for joy in verse 4. Goldingay comments that the Tamid, chapter 7, Mishnah 4,

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<sup>37</sup> Num 10 requires the blowing of silver trumpets at the three annual festivals and at the beginning of the month, as well as to signal the breaking of camp. Goldingay, *Psalms*, 2:817.

considers this Psalm eschatological: “‘A song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting.’ Sung in heaven, the act the psalm celebrates will be the final redemption whereby the evenings of exile come to an end.”<sup>38</sup> Although the psalm itself gives no direct support for this interpretation, it is notable that the harp used by the psalmist is also the only instrument used by the twenty-four elders and the saints in Revelation, which could lend credence to such a view. In any case, the psalmist commits to the continual celebration of God’s strong, steadfast love using instruments and voice, while he looks forward to the day when God’s enemies will perish (v. 9), the righteous will flourish (vv. 12-13), and the promised eternal Sabbath rest will arrive. Instruments are used to celebrate the eschatological hope that God has promised to his people.

Psalm 98 first gives a resounding command to worship—“oh sing to the Lord a new song”—then tells the reader why he should worship—“for he has done marvelous things”—and then tells the reader how to worship—with “a joyful noise” (shouting, v. 4), making music (v. 5 NIV), and instrumental worship (vv. 5-6). Lyres, trumpets, and horns are called to worship; however, even their amplification is not enough, as the psalmist also calls on the sea, the rivers, and the mountains to join in praise (vv. 7-8). The abstract praise of instruments, “declares the glory of God” in the same way that “the heavens declare the glory of God,” through beauty, symmetry, complexity, and creativity. Psalm 98 combines the abstract praise of creation and instrumental worship (general revelation) with the propositional truth of God’s redemption and judgment (special revelation).

In Psalm 108, the psalmist resolves to sing, to make melody, and to play his harp and lyre with such intensity that he will “awake the dawn” (v. 2) instead of the dawn awaking him. What is unusual here is that he is declaring the *hesed* love of Yahweh (v. 4) to the “peoples” and “nations” (v. 3) instead of God’s people. Despite the fact that God

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<sup>38</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 3:53.

seems to have rejected his people in their cause against pagan foes (vv. 11-12), the psalmist is intent on proclaiming God's faithfulness to those foes. Instrumental worship is both a witness to the world, and a declaration of God's faithfulness in the midst of extreme oppression.

Psalm 144 commences a crescendo of instrumental praise which will culminate in Psalm 150. Psalm 144 models the singing of a "new song" (v. 9) with the accompaniment of a ten-stringed lyre. Psalm 149 also commands the singing of a "new song" with dancing and making melody to him with tambourine and lyre, worshipping God for his ultimate victory over all evil. A "new song" occurs six times in the Psalms,<sup>39</sup> four of which involve instrumental worship. The term also appears in Isaiah 42:10, and twice in Revelation (5:9, 14:3), where it is accompanied by harps. In Scripture, a "new song" is associated with Yahweh's deliverance of His people, his marvelous acts, and his ultimate victory over unrighteousness. Six of the nine times a new song is mentioned in Scripture, instrumental worship reinforces its declaration.

Psalm 147 sits between the new songs of Psalm 144 and 149, a quiet meditation on God's compassionate kindness toward the broken in spirit to the accompaniment of the lyre. The curators of the Psalms seem to give the reader a reflective instrumental interlude to catch his breath before the climatic outburst of the last few Psalms. Psalm 149 once again calls for the singing of a "new song" utilizing tambourine and lyre. God's people rejoice in God's salvific judgment and his final victory over all evil on behalf of his people. No topic seems off limits to instrumental accompaniment: every aspect of God's character and redemptive work is open to instrumental support.

The biblical use of instrumental worship culminates in Psalm 150. As the last Psalm of the collection, one might imagine that the editors of the Psalms would provide a theological summary of their content. Instead, Psalm 150 exhorts every being to celebrate

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<sup>39</sup> Pss 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1.

God with every means available, in particular, with instruments. It can hardly be an accident that an eruption of instrumental praise concludes the primary collection of Hebrew worship literature. The curators of the Psalms eloquently imply that the life of godly devotion initiated in Psalm 1 ultimately results in a life of praise, a praise so rich and expansive that it presupposes, even demands, the entire spectrum of orchestral instruments for its support. Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman III states that Psalm 150

calls for the employment of instrumental music and dance in order to enhance the praise of God. While some of these instruments are rarely, if ever, said to be used in worship elsewhere in Scripture, there is no reason to regard this accumulation of instruments as strange or eccentric. Rather, the poet is piling up a number of instrumental names in order to communicate that the whole orchestra is involved in this crescendo of praise. . . . The whole panoply of instruments is engaged: wind, string and percussion.<sup>40</sup>

The psalmist summons every class of instrument to praise the Lord for His redemptive acts (“mighty deeds,” v. 2) and the perfections of His character (“his excellent greatness,” v. 2). Since human voices and instruments are not enough, all living creatures are invited to join the symphony (v. 6) . What begins in Psalm 1 with solitary contemplation, culminates in Psalm 150 with creation-wide celebration. The recommendation of a string accompaniment in Psalm 4 climaxes in a command to employ every symphonic resource available in Psalm 150. Devotion to God consummates in a celebration of God, and instrumental worship appears as an expected expression of such a celebration. Walter Bruggeman remarks,

The conclusion of the Psalter is this extravagant summons to praise, which seeks to mobilize all creation with a spontaneous and unreserved act of adoration, praise, gratitude, and awe. . . . We have suggested that psalm 1 is a formal and intentional introduction to the Psalter. It asserts in a decisive way that life under torah is the precondition of all these psalms. . . . Psalm 150 states the outcome of such a life under torah . . . such a life arrives at unencumbered praise.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 478.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 167.

The unencumbered praise and adoration found in Psalm 150 seems to demand multifaceted instrumental support to attain its full potential—not only according to Psalm 150, but according the way instrumental worship is implied, recommended, and modelled, throughout the Psalms. As the psalms move from personal meditation to corporate celebration, instrumental accompaniment follows the same trajectory, moving from the intimate accompaniment of strings or flute in Psalms 4, 5, and 6, to the raucous orchestration of Psalm 150. A life of devotion to God leads to a celebration of God, and instrumental worship is a natural expression of such a celebration.

The use of instrumental music in the Psalms can be summarized with the following four points. (1) Instrumental music is strongly suggested by the Hebraic terms *zamar* and *mizmor*, which occur ninety-nine times in the Psalms. These terms strongly imply making music with voices *and* instruments. (2) Instrumental worship is instructed in the superscripts of nine Psalms as an appropriate means of performing them.<sup>42</sup> (3) Instrumental worship is modeled in nine Psalms as an assumed means of worship.<sup>43</sup> (4) Finally, instrumental worship is commanded no less than six times in the Psalms,<sup>44</sup> climaxing in Psalm 150, a cascade of exhortations for its enthusiastic practice. While Old Testament commands may not necessarily apply to New Testament believers, at minimum, they reveal a divine endorsement of instrumental worship, and that endorsement is not specifically revoked in the New Testament. Seen through the lens of the Psalms, instrumental music is neither trivial nor incidental, nor an after-thought. It is a vital, pervasive, and eagerly embraced means of worship, meditation, and rejoicing.

Taken as a whole, the place of instrumental worship in the Psalms seems difficult to overstate. Professor of Old Testament Miles V. Van Pelt believes that “the

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<sup>42</sup> Pss 4, 5, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Pss 47:5, 49:4, 57:8, 71:22, 92:1-3, 108:1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Pss 33:2-3, 81:2-3, 95:5-6, 147:7, 149:3, 150:3-5. Taking the verses separately, one could argue that instrumental worship is commanded eleven times throughout the Psalms.

purpose of the book of Psalms is to instruct God's people in how to experience the abundant life for which God has created and redeemed them . . . whether the depths of despair or the heights of joy."<sup>45</sup> If this statement is true, then instrumental worship is at minimum an enhancement to experiencing the abundant life, and at maximum a divinely ordained means of expressing the godly abundant life.

Old Testament scholar C. Hassel Bullock states, "The Book of Psalms is a record of God's call and of his people's response, enacted a thousand times in history."<sup>46</sup> The Psalms present instrumental worship as a significant means of responding to God's call by reinforcing the worship of God's character and rehearsing His redemptive acts. Instrumental worship is implicitly and explicitly sanctioned, routinely modeled, and exuberantly utilized in the Psalms.

### **Instrumental Worship in the Prophets**

The Old Testament prophets continue to model instrumental worship as intensification of an authentic, prophetic message, yet they never hesitate to condemn its misuse. In Isaiah 5:12, for example, the prophet condemns those who "have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands." The prophets never hesitate to denounce hypocritical worship; worship which is divorced from God's redemptive works and personal holiness. Later, in Isaiah 30:29-32, however, instrumental music is seen as an integral part of the celebration as the Israelites are restored to the "mountain of the Lord" with the "sound of the flute" while they rejoice in the righteous judgment on the Assyrians to the "sound of tambourines and lyres." Jeremiah 31:3-4, for example, also describes

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<sup>45</sup> Miles V. Van Pelt, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 374.

<sup>46</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 3.

tambourines accompanying the restoration of Israel, a means of celebrating God's everlasting love and continued faithfulness to his people.

The prophet Amos denounces not only the Israelites' instrumental worship, but also God-ordained feasts, assemblies, offerings, and songs: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen" (Amos 5:21-23).

The prophet goes further in Amos 6:5, rebuking people who "like David invent for themselves instruments of music," because their hearts were far from God and showed no concern for the well-being of his people. No worship—instrumental or otherwise—is acceptable when the worshipper ignores holy living and compassion for others. As the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* states, "Repeated second-person pronouns ("your") focus attention on the offerers: it is the worship of these people that God refuses to accept, not all sacrifice, singing and harp music per se."<sup>47</sup> The prophet unequivocally identifies the people's hypocritical actions and attitudes as the central problem, not their use of instruments in worship.

Daniel 3:4-6 presents an exemplar of corrupt instrumental worship in the account of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. The conceited ruler assembles an orchestra of every instrument known in the ancient world to celebrate his personal vanity project.

And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

The narrator sets up the scene as a grotesque parody of the Temple worship of David and Solomon, contrasting their extravagant worship of the true God with

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<sup>47</sup> Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 687.

Nebuchadnezzar's unbridled self-adulation. The locus of astonishment for authentic instrumental worship is God's character, His redemptive acts, and His glory. In contrast, the locus of astonishment for Nebuchadnezzar's festivities is his grandiose orchestra, the spectacular idol, and, ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar's inflated ego. Orchestra ministries should pay heed to the lessons in this passage. By their very nature, orchestra ministries create a type of visual and aural spectacle, which is a component part of their impact in large scale worship. If church orchestras, however, allow the sonic impact and visual spectacle of their ministry to override the biblical purpose of celebrating God's character and redemptive acts, they will also evolve into a pompous vanity project.

The Old Testament prophets provide other examples of instrumental music used in the service of prophecy, perhaps similar to 1 Chronicles 25. In 1 Samuel 10:5, Samuel tells Saul that he will meet a "group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying." In 2 Kings 3, Elisha prophesies for Joram and Jehoshaphat only after requesting an instrumentalist, saying, "Now bring me a musician." And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him" (v. 15). Habakkuk 3 is a Psalm intended for public worship (the choirmaster) accompanied by stringed instruments. It summarizes Habakkuk's response of trust and praise to God's severe judgment of his own people. Even though the prophets condemn the misuse of instrumental worship, they also validate its appropriate use, in which it seems to serve as an intensification or amplification of the emotional power of their message. Many writers who discourage or reject the use of instrumental worship often refer to the negative examples mentioned previously as biblical support for the prohibition of instruments in worship, yet the contexts unquestionably demonstrate that the problem is with the hearts of the people and not the use instruments per se.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The prophets repeatedly use the trumpet not as an accompaniment to worship or proclamation, but as a symbol, similar to the trumpet in Revelation. The trumpet announces God's impending judgment against Israel (Isa 58:1; Jer 6:1; Ezek 7:14; Hos 8:1, Zeph 1:16, for example) or against other nations (Jer 49:2, 51:27; Amos 2:2, for example). Joel 2:1-2 declares, "Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my



The prophets highlight several facets of instrumental worship. (1) They model instrumental worship as an accompaniment and an amplification of their prophetic message. (2) Ezra and Nehemiah consider instrumental worship important enough that they quickly reestablish it after the nation's return from exile. (3) The prophets do not hesitate to condemn hypocritical instrumental worship along with idolatry and social injustice. By the same token, members of a modern church orchestra should model an authentic Christian lifestyle. Hypocritical living should not be acceptable in church orchestra members simply because of their non-verbal role in the worship service. (4) Nebuchadnezzar's pompous vanity project serves as a cautionary example for church orchestras. It illustrates that orchestras must not allow the spectacle or the excellence of their ministry to override the biblical purpose of celebrating God's character and redemptive acts.

### **Instrumental Worship in Intertestamental Period**

The intertestamental period does not provide a large body of information concerning the use of instrumental worship, but some evidence exists in the Deuterocanonical literature. First Maccabees 4:52-53 (written ca 100 BC) describes the use of instrumental worship for the rededication of the Temple in 165 BC:

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt-offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with

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holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near." In Joel 2:5, the sounding of the trumpet is a call to repentance and fasting. Jeremiah also uses the image of a trumpet as a cue to judgment and repentance (Jer 4:19, 21). Isa 27:13 depicts "a great trumpet" heralding the imminent deliverance of the nation. Zech 9:14 offers one of the more unique anthropomorphic images in the Bible, saying that "the Lord God will blow the trumpet" signaling Judah's victory over her oppressors. Although the immanence of God is often associated with the sound of a trumpet (Exod 19:19; Ps 47:5; 1 Thess 4:16), Zech 9:14 is the only instance in Scripture where God is explicitly portrayed as playing an instrument. The anthropomorphism fuses elements from the silver trumpets of Exod 10 (God's protection, mercy, and sovereignty over his people), with the symbolism of impending judgment, seen in the previously mentioned Old Testament prophets. Instead of the Levites or priests blowing the shofars or the silver trumpets, God himself blows the trumpet, indicating that He alone is responsible for the restoration of Israel and the judgment of her enemies.

songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them.

Another example is in 1 Maccabees 13, depicting the liberation of Jerusalem in 141 BC: “On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred and seventy-first year, the Jews entered it with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel” (1 Macc 13:51).

In both examples, instrumental worship is described in a manner consistent with Old Testament practice, indicating its continued use during the intertestamental period, at least when circumstances allowed it. Although written much later, the Mishnah (ca. AD 200) describes instrumental worship in the Second Temple period as using silver trumpets, cymbals, *nebel*, and *kinnor* (probably harp and lyre). Musicologist James McKinnon explains,

They played “on no less than two harps nor more than six,” and again that there were “no less than nine kitharas and they could be increased unto infinity, but there was only one cymbal,” and finally that “there were no less than twelve Levites standing on the platform and they could be increased into infinity.” It is not clear whether these twelve were to include the previously mentioned instrumentalists or not, but in any case, twelve was the absolute minimum of musicians the Mishnah deemed appropriate for the daily psalm. . . . After each section (*pereq*) of the psalm the trumpets sounded a *teki’ah* and the people prostrated themselves.<sup>49</sup>

Instrumental worship remained an approved expression of praise throughout the intertestamental period.

### **Instrumental Worship in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, instrumental worship is sparsely mentioned. The lack of references is hardly surprising, however, given the trials of the fledgling church. Just as instrumental worship flourished in the Old Testament when the nation of Israel prospered, so instrumental worship only begins to flourish in the church when it becomes well established. New Testament scholar C. F. D. Moule observes, “Though the Temple had

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<sup>49</sup> James W. McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 77.

elaborate choirs with instrumental accompaniment, the poor and frequently clandestine Christian assemblies can hardly have boasted instruments.”<sup>50</sup> The persecution of the early church inhibited all Christian art forms, especially one, which by its very nature, would announce itself to the surrounding world. Instrumental worship is, however, implied in the Epistles and explicitly referenced in Revelation.

In Romans 15:9, Paul reinforces the great truth that Jews and Gentiles have been united in Christ using four quotes from the Old Testament. The first quote is from Psalm 18:49: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” The original Hebrew phrase “sing to your name” uses a derivative of the word *zamar*, therefore the last half of the verse could be translated as “make music to your name” per the previous discussion of the Psalms. In this case, Paul uses the Greek term *psallo*, which has similar implications to the Hebrew word *zamar*. In other words, the Greek word *psallo* implies the use of instruments in a manner similar to Hebrew term *zamar*. Strong’s Dictionary defines *psallo* as “to twitch, twang,” then “to play a stringed instrument with the fingers” and hence, “to sing with a harp, sing psalms.”<sup>51</sup> Paul uses the same term three more times in his Epistles—twice in 1 Corinthians 14 and once in Ephesians 5—and James uses it in James 5.

What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise (make music) with my spirit, but I will sing (make music) with my mind also. (1 Cor 14:15)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody (music) to the Lord with your heart. (Eph 5:18-19)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. (make music, Jas 5:13)

While the five references do not explicitly command or model instrumental worship, they carry the implication of instrumental worship in much the same way the

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<sup>50</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1961), 65

<sup>51</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*, 274.

use of *zamar* and *mizmor* convey a similar connotation in the Psalms. At minimum, such passages imply an affirmation of instrumental worship in the New Testament, or at minimum seem to contradict the notion that New Testament silence on the matter expressly forbids it.

The book of Revelation, however, contains at least two instances of instrumental worship which occur in rather significant contexts.<sup>52</sup> The first occurrence of New Testament instrumental worship is found in Revelation 5:8-10:

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

While this reference to instrumental worship may be short, it provides multiple connections to the Old Testament. First, the elders use harps, the principle instrument of David, the main accompaniment of the Psalms, and a prominent instrument of Levitical Temple worship.<sup>53</sup> Second, the use of instrumental worship comes at a pivotal moment in the Revelation narrative: the Lamb appears in the narrative for the first time, and by taking the scroll from God, he achieves several redemptive objectives: He (1) shows himself equal to the Father; (2) assumes authority over all creation and the right to judge all creation; (3) ushers in the culmination of God’s redemptive plan for mankind and all creation; (4) initiates the final judgment of all evil; and (5) the restoration of God’s kingdom on earth. The four living creatures and twenty-four elders are celebrating the central act of salvation history and the creation of a “kingdom and priests to our God,”

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<sup>52</sup> Although trumpets are referred to several times in Revelation, they are used to describe the voice of God (Rev 1:10, 4:1) or used to signal impending judgment (Rev 8:2-12). They are not used as an accompaniment to worship.

<sup>53</sup> Grant Osborne writes, “The harp was a primary instrument used in singing psalms (Pss 33:2; 57:8; 98:5; 147:7) and was David’s instrument (1 Sam 16:16). It adds an atmosphere of festive joy to the worship (as in the temple choirs of 1 Chron 25:1-6; Neh 12:27).” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 258.

the fulfillment of Exodus 19:6. Hamilton summarizes the moment bluntly: “If that scroll isn’t opened, the Bible’s promises don’t come true. Hope is defeated.”<sup>54</sup> Instrumental worship may be “underrepresented” in the New Testament, but when it finally appears, one could hardly imagine a more cosmic moment in the redemptive storyline.

Third, the identity of the heavenly harp choir, i.e., the twenty-four elders, brings more weight to the significance of instrumental worship. According to New Testament Professor G. K. Beale, the twenty-four elders are angelic beings “who, taken together, represent the church in its character as a universal priesthood of believers.”<sup>55</sup> Beale continues,

the elders here are to be identified as angelic beings representing the church as a whole, including the saints of the OT. If the four living creatures are heavenly representatives of all animate life throughout creation (as most interpreters think), then the elders are probably heavenly representatives of God’s people. The four living beings represent general creation and the elders the elect of God’s special creation. Also suggesting an angelic identification of the elders is the fact that the angel who reveals the visions of the book to John is referred to as “a fellow-servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book,” all of whom are to worship together (22:9).

Therefore, the reality being conveyed is that the church is represented in heaven by powerful heavenly beings who attend the throne of God, and who therefore hold great power (they have their own thrones and wear golden crowns), which they exercise on our behalf. The elders are angels who operate in a priestly capacity by presenting the prayers of the saints to God (compare 5:8 and 8:3) and by interpreting heavenly visions to people (compare 5:5; 7:13 and 10:4, 8; 19:9; 22:8). This further reflects their Levitical priestly identification noted above.<sup>56</sup>

If Beale’s interpretation of the twenty-four elders holding harps is correct, then instrumental worship is not a shadow or type which was completed in Christ and passed away with the Old Testament covenant. Instead, earthly instrumental worship runs parallel with the heavenly worship of the angelic host seated around the throne of God,

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<sup>54</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 126.

<sup>55</sup> G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 86.

<sup>56</sup> Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 87.

mirroring the worship of the twenty-four elders around the celestial throne. New Testament scholar Grant Osborne holds to a similar interpretation of the twenty-four elders, concluding, “Their primary role is that of worship (5:14; 11:16; 19:4) and praise (4:11; 5:9–10; 11:17–18; 14:3; 19:4),”<sup>57</sup> and their “priestly role would fit their function as leaders of heavenly worship and as presenting the prayers of the saints to God.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the Levitical ministry of prophetic instrumental praise depicted in 1 Chronicles 25 was not a shadow of things that would be fulfilled in Christ, it was a paralleling of a heavenly reality, a priestly orchestra joined with an angelic orchestra in antiphonal worship; an imperfect earthly symphony which will be redeemed and join the angelic symphony in the new heaven and earth (see Rev 15:2-4). Instrumental worship is not fulfilled in Christ, it is redeemed in Christ and will one day join the New Jerusalem Philharmonic in eternal praise.

Revelation 14:1-3a also strongly implies instrumental worship:

Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.

Hamilton suggests that the staggering sound of “harpists harping their harps”<sup>59</sup> in Revelation 14:2b, is not just a sound “like” harps but the choir of the 144,000 redeemed from 14:1 playing harps and singing.<sup>60</sup> Commenting on “those who had conquered the beast” in chapter 15:2, Beale remarks, “They are the same group as the

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<sup>57</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 229.

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 229.

<sup>59</sup> Osborne writes, “The Greek is clumsy, with three cognates emphasizing the harps, ‘harpists harping their harps.’ Κιθαρῳδοῦν (kitharōdōn, harpists) does not refer just to persons playing harps but rather to those who accompany their singing with harps.” Osborne, *Revelation*, 514.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton states, “The redeemed have harps, just as the 144,000 had harps in 14:2.” Hamilton, *Revelation*, 250.

totality of the redeemed pictured in 14:1-5, since they also hold harps in their hands. The playing of harps which they hold will form part of the praise which they render in vv. 3-4.”<sup>61</sup> The 144,000 redeemed sing a “new song”—accompanied by harps—before the throne and the Lamb. Although no lyrics are given, it is safe to assume the lyrics would parallel the “new song” of Revelation 5 that praises the Lamb for his work of redemption. The new song of Revelation 5, in turn, recalls “new songs” from the Old Testament, which typically praise God for salvation and his steadfast, redeeming love.<sup>62</sup> The instrumental worship accompaniment of the new song of Revelation moves from the twenty-four angelic elders to the 144,000 redeemed, while reaching back to the instrumental worship of the Old Testament. Just as the people of God in the Old Testament were encouraged to sing a new song accompanied by strings (Ps 33:3), the lyre, trumpets, and horn (Ps 98:1, 5-6), by a ten-stringed harp (Ps 144:9), and with tambourine and lyre (Ps 149:1, 3), so now they are encouraged to play and sing a new song of salvation to the accompaniment of a thunderous harp ensemble. The instrument of David, of the Temple, and of the Psalms reverberates before the throne of the Lamb.

The third passage in Revelation that highlights instrumental worship is

Revelation 15:2-4:

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Although Revelation 15 does not quite hold the place of cosmic significance as the handing of the scroll to the Lamb in Revelation 5, it takes place at a critical juncture in the narrative. John introduces the seven plagues as the final outpouring of God’s wrath

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<sup>61</sup> Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 249.

<sup>62</sup> Pss 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1; Isa 42:10

in verse 1, then pauses briefly to describe the host of the redeemed singing a psalm of praise with harps. The scene is rich with images that connect the New Testament to the Old: (1) the sea of glass parallels the Red Sea, through which God provided redemption for Moses and the Israelites; (2) the seven plagues echo the plagues of Egypt; and (3) the title “Song of Moses” reminds the reader of the song of redemption that they sang after crossing the Red Sea, but now it is also the “Song of the Lamb,” the true Passover lamb, whose blood allows God to “pass over” in judgment by taking judgment upon himself. Furthermore, the double-title, the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb, connects the chief representative of the old covenant with the chief representative of the new covenant. Beale distills the Old Testament connections:

Just as the Israelites praised God by the sea after He had delivered them from Pharaoh, so the church praises God for defeating the beast on its behalf. Like God’s people of old, so God’s new covenant people praise Him by singing the song of Moses the bond-servant of God. Moses is called God’s servant in Exod. 14:31, immediately before his singing in Chapter 15. However, the song now is about the much greater deliverance accomplished through the work of the Lamb. The saints praise the Lamb’s victory as the typological fulfillment of that to which the Red Sea victory pointed.<sup>63</sup>

While the use of instrumental worship in the New Testament may be meager, it appears at a crucial juncture in Revelation. The song of Moses and of the Lamb unite the central redemptive events of the Old and New Testament to the resounding accompaniment of a mammoth harp choir. God’s mighty acts of justice and redemption demand that the “harpist harp their harps” while singing with all their might. The new song of the twenty-four elders becomes the new song of the 144,000 redeemed, sung before the throne and the Lamb. While instrumental accompaniment may be optional for Revelation praise, it is certainly not discouraged, and when it appears, it is used to deafening effect by angelic beings and the redeemed of the Lamb. It connects the Psalmody of the Old Testament with song of redemption in the New Testament; it binds the ministry of the Levitical priesthood to the ministry of angelic beings and the worship of the saints. What began as

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<sup>63</sup> Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 249-50.



an impromptu tambourine performance by a ragtag group of escaped slaves culminates in a celestial harp choir around the throne of heaven. The promise of the Song of Moses by the Red Sea becomes an eternal reality in the Song of Moses and the Lamb by the glassy sea.

In the grand narration of Scripture, the biblical view of instrumental worship is multilayered, multifaceted, and multidimensional. It is multilayered through its use in a diversity of worship settings: personal or corporate, simple or extravagant, spontaneous or meticulously planned. It is multifaceted in supporting every form of proclamation and worship: prophecy, meditation, repentance, taking vows, celebration, and revival. Instrumental worship also underscores the multifaceted glory of God's character: His sovereignty and majesty, His faithfulness and love, His holiness and mercy. Finally, instrumental worship is multidimensional; its earthly implementation parallels a heavenly reality. Terrestrial orchestras join with celestial creatures and sanctified saints in glorifying God for his supreme plan of redemption and restoration in an eternal symphony.

God's people seem continually compelled to employ instrumental worship in expressing their joy, delight, devotion, and reverence to Him. While instrumental worship is never presented as a non-negotiable practice, it is routinely portrayed as a desirable enhancement to worship, an intensification of God's message to his people, and as an act of worship in its own right. Modern church orchestras should see themselves as part of biblical heritage which God repeatedly encourages, commands, and blesses. Modern orchestra members should consider their playing as an act of worship, an accompaniment to worship, and a prophetic intensification of worship. Naturally, actions and motives of church instrumentalists must align with Scripture, but that is a prerequisite for any ministry in the church. Chapter 3 will discuss the potential reasons why instrumental worship is so ingrained in humanity's desire to honor God with its heart, soul, and might, as well as some of the controversial issues surrounding instrumental music.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL-HISTORICAL ISSUES  
RELATED TO INSTRUMENTAL WORSHIP

**Early Church Culture and Instrumental Worship**

One of the most difficult issues concerning instrumental worship is its near universal rejection by the early Church Fathers. McKinnon candidly states, “The antagonism which the Fathers of the early Church displayed towards instruments has two outstanding characteristics: vehemence and uniformity.”<sup>1</sup> Such objections must be addressed for two reasons: (1) the Church Fathers are responsible for formulating many fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity, therefore their historical and theological perspectives should be taken seriously; and (2) the prohibition of instrumental worship continues in some denominations and churches today. Famous preachers such as Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) would not allow instruments in their churches, saying, “We do not need them [instruments], they would hinder than help our praise.”<sup>2</sup> Church instrumentalists should understand such concerns and know how to address them in a biblical manner.

Although the early Church Fathers object to instrumental worship, their objections do not begin to surface until the second century. Little material exists concerning instrumental worship in the first century; therefore, most ideas concerning its use must be extrapolated indirectly. Besides the Old Testament, the three main influences that would

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<sup>1</sup> James McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms*, Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 1:127. Although Spurgeon did not allow instruments in his own church, he was not completely dogmatic about it, admitting that he could not condemn Martin Luther or George Herbert for their use of instruments.

have most likely framed the views of the early church concerning instrumental worship would have been the Temple, the synagogues, and Greek thought.

### **Temple Worship**

The Temple seems to have continued a program of instrumental music until its destruction in AD 70 per the previous discussion on instrumental worship in the intertestamental period. Early Jewish Christians continued to attend Temple worship, which would have included choral and instrumental ensembles. In Acts 20:16, for example, Luke writes that Paul “was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost” so that he could attend the annual festival at the Temple. This event would have taken place around AD 55, over twenty years after the resurrection, so attending Temple ceremonies was an accepted practice among Jewish Christians. Although the Temple traditions of teaching and reciting Scripture were probably ingrained in early Jewish Christians, the practice of worship with choirs and an instrumental ensemble was non-existent outside of the Temple. The *Dictionary of New Testament Background* explains, “The earliest church consisted of small, informal gatherings, while the temple was a highly regularized formal institution, therefore allowing for little direct influence.”<sup>3</sup> The gap between informal house church worship and Temple worship might have been further exacerbated by Temple leadership, which became more and more antagonistic toward the early church. In addition, the church came to understand the ceremonial aspects of Temple worship as unnecessary, and might have associated instrumental worship with now unnecessary Temple rituals. As the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, any influence—positive or negative—that Temple instrumental music might have had on the nascent church disappeared during the first generation of Christians.

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<sup>3</sup> Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 1280.

## Synagogue Worship

The second major influence in early Christian worship was the local synagogues, which were much closer to early house churches in format and style. Synagogues were places where teaching, study, prayer, and Scripture reading took place, but beyond that, not much is certain about synagogue practice in the first century. McKinnon describes the synagogue service as consisting of “a gathering of the community to participate in the reading of Scripture, discourse upon it, prayer, and the singing of Psalms.”<sup>4</sup> While some synagogues may have used a shofar to call people to worship, little evidence indicates that other instruments were used. The lack of instruments, however, was not the result of an official ban; instead, instrumental usage was, as McKinnon says, “beside the point.”<sup>5</sup> More importantly, music itself was beside the point in local synagogues. Their services focused on the reading, teaching, and exposition of Scripture; any singing was probably a simple, chant-like declamation of Psalms, nothing like the elaborate choral-instrumental presentations practiced in the Temple.

## Greco-Roman Culture

The third major influence on attitudes toward instruments was the prevailing Greco-Roman culture. While Greeks valued music in their educational system, including it in the quadrivium of mathematical arts (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), they displayed a suspicion toward it well before the beginning of Christianity. According to McKinnon, Plato (c. 424–c. 347 BC), “calls for a ban on the aulos and on ‘many-stringed instruments’ in his ideal state ( Republic 399 d), while Livy (c. 59 BC–c. AD 17) includes ‘women harpists and sambucists’ among the undesirable Eastern luxuries introduced into republican Rome by the Asiatic army of Scipio Africanus.”<sup>6</sup> Instrumental

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<sup>4</sup> McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> James McKinnon, *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2:71.

music was considered a means of encouraging immoral behavior, and often viewed as an objectionable activity in Greek culture.

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC–50 AD) uniquely illustrates the melding of cultural viewpoints. He was a Jewish thinker trained in Greek philosophy, and was contemporaneous with Christ. According to Bible Professor Everett Ferguson, Philo believed in the “ethos theory” of the Stoics and Platonists in which

the positive effects of music resulted in harmony of the soul and of the whole person. . . . But music was also associated with unworthy pleasures: myriads every day fill up the theatres where they honor “those who play the kithara and sing to its accompaniment and all the effeminate and unmanly music, approving the dancers and other mimes.” In contrast to Jewish festivals, the seductive power of such types of music “through the ears arouse ungovernable lusts” and advance idolatry.<sup>7</sup>

Greeks saw music as having the power to stimulate moral behavior in both positive and negative ways and seemed particularly suspicious of the adverse influence of instrumental music. Professor of Pastoral Theology Andrew McGowan sums up the influence of Greek and Jewish culture:

There were, however, some actively negative associations too; various instruments were an important part of continuing gentile and former Jewish sacrificial rituals, the former demonic and the latter superseded, in the view of many Christians at least. Thus, despite plenty of biblical references to the use of instruments and abundant metaphorical notions of harmony, the most common attitudes among Christian writers toward actual instrumental music vary on a spectrum from indifference to suspicion.<sup>8</sup>

When the Church Fathers begin to voice their opinions on instruments in the second century, they seem to ignore the rich heritage of instrumental worship in the Old Testament while embracing the worst suspicions of Greek thought. David Appleby quotes Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) as saying, “We need one instrument: the peaceful word of adoration, not harps or pipes or drums or trumpets.”<sup>9</sup> Joseph Galineau

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<sup>7</sup> Everett Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 3, *Worship, Eucharist, Music, and Gregory of Nyssa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 147-48.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Brian McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 122.

<sup>9</sup> David P. Appleby, *History of Church Music* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 23.

cites St. Basil (c. 329–379): “Whenever a reader falls into playing a harp, he must confess it; if he falls repeatedly, he will be excluded from the church.”<sup>10</sup> McKinnon quotes Arnobius (died c. 330) saying,

Did God send souls [to earth] so that these members of a holy and noble race should here practice music and the arts of the piper . . . that they should sing obscene songs? . . . Did he send them so that as males they become pederasts and as females, they become harlots, harpist, and kitharists, giving their bodies for hire? (*Adversus nationes* II:42).<sup>11</sup>

The Church Fathers almost uniformly associated instruments with pagan worship, or immoral behavior at theaters, weddings, and feasts. Moreover, Musicologist Joachim Braun indicates that both Greek and Jewish instrumental worship were likely very similar.

Plutarch, Tacitus, Philo of Alexandria, and other sources such as the books of the Maccabees all point out that the same music ceremony accompanied the rituals associated with the Nabataean and Jewish communities, and this ceremony was in turn quite similar to that associated with the cult of Dionysus. . . . Clement of Alexandria tells us that the Greek *skólion* with lyre accompaniment was actually quite similar to the singing of Jewish Psalms.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the style of Temple music and Greco-Roman pagan music were quite comparable; therefore, prejudice against Greek music might have carried over to Temple music. Moreover, the simplicity of synagogue and early house church worship would have presented a stark contrast to the musical style of Temple worship or pagan worship. In any case, whatever positive influence the Temple and Old Testament might have held, dissipated, and negative views of Greco-Roman culture prevailed.

While most historical documents oppose the acceptance of instrumental music in the early church, a few accounts present it in a positive light. First of all, there seems to be very little mention of instrumental worship—positive or negative—during the first

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship* (London: Burns, 1964), 150.

<sup>11</sup> McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written and Comparative Sources* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 193.

century of the early church. Most of the ferocious invectives against instruments begin in the second or third century or later, therefore instrumental worship cannot be ruled out on the basis of first century testimony, because such testimony does not exist.

Second, some evidence does present instrumental praise in a positive light. Although Clement generally disapproved of instruments per the above discussion, Gelineau also quotes him as saying, “If someone should discover you singing to the accompaniment of the harp or the lyre, you will incur not reproach; you are but imitating the just king of the Hebrews (David) giving thanks to God”<sup>13</sup> Gelineau also points out that, “St. Augustine makes mention of harp-playing during a funeral vigil in the chapel wherein lay the relics of St. Cyprian.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, although Gregory of Nyssa (c. 329–c. 391) exhibited the customary hostility toward instrumental music, he apparently understood the instrumental implications of the Greek term *psallos*:

There is a distinction between psalm, ode, praise, hymn and prayer. A psalm is the melody made by a musical instrument. An ode is a melodious expression made by the mouth with words. A prayer is a supplication brought to God with reference to something of concern. A hymn is the honor rendered to God for the good things which are ours. . . .Gregory in this passage presents the definition of ψαλμός [*psallos*] in classical Greek: “the sound of the cithara or harp.”<sup>15</sup>

Most importantly, closer inspection of the Church Fathers’ views of instrumental music reveal that the object of their wrath is not the use of instruments in worship, but rather instrumental music outside the church. McKinnon writes, “Chiefly three social institutions are involved: the wedding, the theatre and the banquet; the three, apparently, were frequently the occasion of musical ribaldry in antiquity.”<sup>16</sup> The denunciation of instrumental music was almost exclusively reserved for occasions outside of Christian worship. The Church Fathers never debated the idea of instrumental worship in worship

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<sup>13</sup> Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, 241-43.

<sup>16</sup> McKinnon, *The Early Christian World*, 2:71.

because early Christian liturgy prioritized the simple cantillation of psalms and early hymns. McKinnon remarks,

The patristic denunciation of instruments involves the sort of circumstances just cited, such as the theatre, banquets, etc., but not church services. We have no patristic passage that can in any way be construed as a condemnation of instruments in church. The issue is an anachronistic reading of nineteenth-century attitudes (when “worldly” instruments were in fact pitted against the purity of a cappella church music) into entirely different early Christian circumstances . . . we have not a hint from the voluminous fourth-and fifth-century Christian literature that there was any felt need to bring musical instruments into the process [of Christian worship].<sup>17</sup>

If McKinnon is correct in his analysis, then the views of the Church Fathers on instrumental music were much deeper than a prohibition of instrumental worship. Instead, the Fathers condemned instrumental music in any almost any form. A modern denomination which justifies a ban on instrumental worship by citing the Church Fathers, should also prohibit almost any form of instrumental music in any context.

In conclusion, the negative attitudes of the Church Fathers toward instrumental music and the emphasis on simple vocal music in the early church probably resulted from a combination of influences: (1) Early house church worship was most likely patterned after synagogue worship which emphasized Scripture, teaching and prayer. While synagogues utilized simple chant-like singing of Scripture, they developed no tradition of instrumental worship. (2) Early Christians might have developed an aversion toward Temple worship due to the persecution from Temple leadership. (3) Early Christians could have also associated the cessation of the Temple system of sacrifice with a termination of instrumental worship. (4) Since Temple instrumental worship and pagan instrumental worship were similar in style, Christians might have been repulsed by all instrumental music because of pagan connotations. Therefore, while the opinion of the Church Fathers must be considered regarding instrumental worship, evidence suggests that multiple cultural factors might have influenced their condemnation of instrumental worship, even

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<sup>17</sup> McKinnon, *The Early Christian World*, 2:73.



though such condemnation was at odds with the Old Testament and had no basis in the New Testament.

### **Instrumental Worship as Allegory**

Another matter which must be addressed is how the Church Fathers justified their polemic against instruments. Although the Old Testament unambiguously endorsed instrumental worship, the Church Fathers began to interpret scriptural worship in a hyper-spiritualized manner. Instead of using the historical, contextual, or literal meaning of a passage, the Fathers interpreted it allegorically or symbolically. Professor Marco Conti explains,

The fathers of the church were not interested in a philological and historical reading of the Bible, so their exegesis did not take into consideration the Deuteronomic or Chronicler's outlook, which link or separate the historical books included in the present volume, but moved along different lines of interpretation. Their exegesis . . . was mostly based on a typological-allegorical and/or moral interpretation. Consequently, their reading of the historical books was not comprehensive and systematic but concentrated on those single episodes, where a typological or moral interpretation was possible, while those other events described in the biblical narrative which did not fit in with their exegetical principles were neglected.<sup>18</sup>

The Church Fathers invariably employed allegorical interpretation in dealing with instruments. Any scriptural reference to instrumental worship was understood allegorically and reinterpreted in terms of holy living outside of corporate worship. Cassiodorus (c. 485–c.585), for instance, interprets Psalm 21:14: “To sing means to proclaim the words of the Lord with the mouth. To make music on the harp means to fulfill the divine commands faithfully through good works.”<sup>19</sup> Everett comments, “When the fathers met instruments in the Old Testament, either they put them in the category of material sacrifices which had now been replaced by spiritual worship or else they

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<sup>18</sup> Marco Conti, *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Ancient Commentary on Scripture, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Cassiodorus, quoted in Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1-50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 274.

allegorized the instruments as parts of the body or as spiritual principles.”<sup>20</sup> While allegorical exposition is not necessarily wrong—it is used at times in Scripture—it is also highly susceptible to misuse.

The danger of allegorical interpretation is that a Scripture can take on any meaning an interpreter desires; it is intrinsically independent of the plain meaning, original purpose, or historical context. For example, Conti cites Justin Martyr’s (c. 110–165) interpretation of 2 Kings 6:1-6, which narrates the miraculous recovery of a lost axe head: “The piece of wood thrown by Elisha into the river typifies the cross, while the water foreshadows salvation through baptism.”<sup>21</sup> Though such an interpretation is not heretical per se, it violates the narrative context, the authorial intent, and has no typological warrant from Scripture.

In particular, the Church Fathers utilized an allegorical approach in the Psalms, which posed a pointed dilemma: on the one hand, Psalmody had become a rich source of congregational song, yet on the other hand it constantly reminded the singers that instrumental worship was an authentic, habitual, and God-ordained means of praise. The Church Fathers solved this conundrum through allegorical interpretation. Origen (c. 184–c. 253), for example, interprets Psalm 150 completely allegorically:

The trumpet is the contemplative mind or the mind by which the teaching of the spirit is embraced. The harp is the busy mind that is quickened by the commands of Christ. The timbrel represents the death of fleshly desire because of honesty itself. Dancing is the agreement of reasonable spirits all saying the same thing and in which there are no divisions. The stringed instruments suggest the unison of the voices of moral excellence and the unity of the organ which is the church of God resting on reflective and active minds. The melodious cymbal reflects the active mind affixed on its desire for Christ; the joyous cymbal the purified mind inspired by the salvation of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, 194.

<sup>21</sup> Conti, *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Origen, quoted in Quentin F. Wesselschmidt and Thomas Oden, eds., *Psalms 51-150*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 567.

Instead of a resounding climax to the entire Psalter, which culminates in instrumental praise and creation worship, Psalm 150 is reduced to hyper-spiritualized moralistic encouragement. Singing is literal, but every reference to playing instruments becomes allegorical. Except for singing, any physical manifestation of worship is inconceivable.

While allegorical interpretation is not prohibited in biblical exposition—Paul uses it, for example, in Galatians 4:21-31—it should never contradict the context, the intent, or the plain meaning of the text. Psalm 150 describes a full-orbed response of worship from God’s people using every resource available. That response is an external, visible, and acoustical demonstration of a people devoted to loving the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. Origen’s interpretation of Psalm 150 impoverishes worship by hyper-spiritualizing it; worship becomes a thought experiment void of any physical expression. In contrast, Psalm 150 enriches worship by depicting the end-result of authentic spirituality: a life in which every means available is used to glorify God. Furthermore, allegorical interpretation cannot be used as an argument to reject instrumental worship. Allegorical interpretation is illustrative but not corroborative. It may illustrate a concept but cannot prove a concept. The Church Fathers’ inclination for allegorical interpretation does not strengthen their case against instrumental worship.

### **Instrumental Worship as Divine Concession**

The church fathers (along with some modern writers)<sup>23</sup> also nullified instruments in the church by classifying instrumental worship in the Old Testament as a concession by God to the Israelites’ “weakness.” Gelineau quotes Chrysostom (c. 349-407), saying, “Instruments were permitted to them out of regard for the weakness of their spirit, and because they had hardly emerged as yet from the cult of idols. Just as God allowed their

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<sup>23</sup> M. C. Kurfees, *Instrumental Music in the Worship, or, The Greek Verb Psallo: Philologically and Historically Examined: Together with a Full Discussion of Kindred Matters Relating to Music in Christian Worship* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1999), 192.

sacrifices, so also He allowed their instruments, condescending to their weakness.”<sup>24</sup>

Pseudo-Justin (c. 400) voices a similar opinion: “It is not the act of singing which characterizes infantilism, but doing so to the accompaniment of inanimate instruments, dancing and shaking rattles. In the churches, therefore, the use of instruments and other childish things have been excluded from the singing, though singing itself has been retained.”<sup>25</sup>

First, this view seems to imply a curiously evolutionary understanding of the development of biblical worship. Does the Bible really consider the worship of the Old Testament as infantile? Is the worship of Abraham—who was willing to sacrifice his own son, because “he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead (Heb 11:19)” — infantile? Or what about Moses, who “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward (Heb 11:26).” Was his faith really dependent on the emotional lift of instrumental music because the weakness of his spirit? On the contrary, authentic instrumental worship is consistently portrayed as a God-honoring activity, a welcome enhancement and expression of worship and revival. It is never portrayed as a crutch for the stunted spiritual development of God’s people.

Second, no Scripture exists that implies the use of instrumental worship as something God merely “permits” or “concedes” because of spiritual weakness. While Jesus points out that God allowed divorce because of the hardness of hearts (Matt 19:8, Mark 10:5), no similar passage exists concerning instrumental worship. Perhaps one could argue that the nation of Israel was in an “infantile” state with their impromptu instrumental offering at the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 15, but it would be difficult to make a similar claim at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple in 2 Chronicles,

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<sup>24</sup> Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*, 151.

<sup>25</sup> Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*, 152.

or at the revivals of Hezekiah and Josiah. If anything, instrumental worship is portrayed as an expression of revival as well as an enhancement to revival. The Israelites do not begin an instrumental program to incite worship or revival, the revival seems to incite instrumental worship as a more comprehensive expression of their gratitude and sincere devotion to God. Even more peculiar would be the inclusion of “infantile” instruments at the celebration of the Lamb in the Revelation 5, 14, and 15. Why would God’s people need a form of infantile worship in the heavenlies, where there is no weakness of spirit? Scripture provides no indication that God permitted instrumental worship as a concession to spiritual immaturity of God’s people.

Finally, the writers would seem to (1) ignore the explicit commands of God to create trumpets in Numbers 10; (2) disregard his clear instructions to use cymbals, harps, and lyres in 2 Chronicles 29; (3) neglect the prophetic role ascribed to instruments in 1 Chronicles 25; and (4) overlook the instrumentally saturated Psalms which model and command the use of instruments a means of expressing and accompanying praise. They miss the metanarrative of the Psalms, which begins in obedience and culminates in wholehearted adoration expressed in verbal and instrumental praise. Such actions do not suggest a God who begrudgingly allows his people to use instruments as an artificial prop for worship.

### **Instrumental Worship as a Type or Shadow**

The third way in which the Church Fathers seek to negate the use of instruments in worship is by claiming that instrumental music was a type or a shadow of things fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5). They consider instruments inseparable from the Temple rituals which are no longer valid in the New Testament covenant. Just as the perfect work of Christ has superseded ritual circumcision and animal sacrifice, so it has also superseded instrumental worship. Since Christ has fulfilled the purpose of the Old Covenant symbols, instruments are no longer necessary because they were a type or a

shadow of Christ. Indeed, instruments in worship represent a type of legalism at best or a syncretism at worst. McKinnon quotes Niceta of Remesiana (335–414) in this regard:

Only what is material [from the Old Testament] has been rejected, such a circumcision, the sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination in foods, and also trumpets, kitharas, cymbals, and tympana, which now understood as the limbs of a man resound with a more perfect music. Daily ablutions, new moon observances, the meticulous inspections of leprosy, along with anything else which was temporarily necessary for the immature are past and over with<sup>26</sup>

Centuries later, Calvin follows a similar line of thought in his commentary on Psalm 33:

We may not indiscriminately consider as applicable to ourselves, everything which was formerly enjoined upon the Jews. I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music, which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple. For even now, if believers choose to cheer themselves with musical instruments, they should, I think, make it their object not to dis sever their cheerfulness from the praises of God. But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law.<sup>27</sup>

Calvin’s views on instrumental worship flow out of his application of the regulative principle. Pastor Bryan Chapell explains, “This principle said that only what is mandated by explicit instruction of Scripture or logically required as a good and necessary consequence of Scripture’s statements was appropriate for the public worship of God.”<sup>28</sup> A strict interpretation of the regulative principle would stipulate that every component included in a Christian worship service should be plainly mandated or modeled in Scripture. The problem arises when Calvin and other Reformers interpret the “explicit instruction of Scripture” to mean the explicit instruction of the New Testament. Since the New Testament does not explicitly endorse instrumental worship, it is rejected as a

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<sup>26</sup> McKinnon, *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> H. J. Selderhuis and Timothy George, *Psalms 1-72*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 364.

<sup>28</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009 ), 56.

legitimate activity in corporate worship according to the regulative principle. However, rejecting a mode of worship which is routinely endorsed and pervasively modeled throughout the Old Testament—and even appears in Revelation—seems unwarranted without an explicit New Testament revocation. I would argue, therefore, that instrumental worship is not negated by the regulative principle but only by an unnecessarily narrow application of it.

As the above quote indicates, Calvin rejected instrumental worship because he considered it inseparable from the Old Testament ritual system, which was fulfilled in Christ. Instrumental worship, however, begins in Exodus 15, disconnected from the institution of Tabernacle worship rituals, yet it clearly has the tacit approval of Yahweh. Instrumental worship should not be considered intrinsic to the sacrificial system but rather as one means among many of expressing or accompanying praise; a means which enhanced the cultic worship of Israel but was independent of it. Instrumental worship should be viewed as a powerful accompaniment to the rituals, but not intrinsic to them. In other words, instruments provided a means of worship—along with singing, clapping, bowing, and shouting—which enhanced the rituals but was not integral to them. Examples supporting such a view are Miriam’s Song in Exodus 15, where God’s people worshipped with instruments with no particular ritual in mind; and Samuel’s sacrifice in 1 Samuel, where they sacrificed animals with no instruments present (1 Sam 7:9). While God commanded Moses to sound the silver trumpets over the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, the point of sounding the trumpets was to remind the people that “I am the Lord your God” (Num 10:10), a statement of praise that would apply equally to Old and New Covenant believers. Instrumental worship was a common expression of worship at ritual celebrations, but never intrinsic to them.

Second, while God commissioned the silver trumpets, and endorsed David’s instrumental program, they are never presented as types or “shadows of the law” (to use Calvin’s language), which were later “fulfilled” in Christ. While Numbers 10 informs the

reader that God explicitly commissioned the silver trumpets for Tabernacle worship, and 2 Chronicles 29:25 informs the reader that He authorized cymbals, harps, and lyres for Temple worship, instruments are never presented as an integral part of the sacred Temple furnishings in the Old Testament, nor are they presented as a type or shadow in the New Testament. Exodus lists the altar (27:1), the basin (30:18), the table of showbread (25:23), the lampstand (25:31), the incense altar (30:1), the ark of the covenant (25:10), and the mercy seat (27:17) as part of the Tabernacle furnishings. Solomon remakes several of the Tabernacle furnishings in 2 Chronicles 4 (the lampstands, for example) into more grandiose Temple versions, but the musical instruments (which were created by David and Solomon) are not listed among the inventory of sacred things.<sup>29</sup>

Pastor John Barber notes that Temple furnishings can be classified as a shadow or type fulfilled in Christ when their use and handling is restricted to the Aaronic priesthood, as seen in Numbers 4:

Why were the Levites not permitted to touch the holy objects? It is because each one pointed to some special aspect of the finished work of Christ. . . . The priests, on the other hand, were permitted to handle the sacred objects and to be ministrants of them, such as burn incense before the Lord, because their work typified Christ and his ministry in a special sense.<sup>30</sup>

When the Aaronic priests had finished covering all items (Num 4:15), only then could the Levitical priests carry them or touch them; yet Levites played the cymbals, harps, and lyres on a regular basis with no restrictions. In other words, while certain furnishings of the Temple fulfill a clear typological role which is realized in Christ, musical instruments were never given such a role. Even the silver trumpets—which only the Aaronic priests played—are never treated like the other sacred furnishings. To quote

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<sup>29</sup> Second Kgs 12:13 is the only time a list of Temple furnishings includes the silver trumpets when the author mentions that Jehoash failed to reconstruct any of the lavish items Solomon had created. The point is not a classification of sacred furnishings, but a rather a sober commentary on the diminished glory of Jehoash's Temple compared to Solomon's Temple.

<sup>30</sup> John Barber, "A Case for the Continuation of Musical Instruments in New Testament Worship," *Reformed Perspectives* 18, no 35 (2016): 3, [http://reformedperspectives.org/articles/joh\\_barber/joh\\_barber.Legatomusicalinstruments.html](http://reformedperspectives.org/articles/joh_barber/joh_barber.Legatomusicalinstruments.html).



Barber again, “Because musical instruments were not part of the special furnishings of the Tabernacle or of Solomon's Temple, they cannot be considered types of the finished work of Christ and therefore are not abrogated by the New Testament.”<sup>31</sup> No direct connection exists between instruments and the Tabernacle/Temple furnishings.

Tambourines appear in Miriam’s Song in Exodus 15 (without the need for a divine commission), yet this event takes place before God commissioned the Temple furnishings in Numbers 4. Furthermore, instruments continue to be integrated into Temple worship by David and Solomon long after symbolic furnishings are completed by Moses. Since instruments were never considered part of the consecrated furnishings that foreshadow the work of Christ, no reason exists to exclude them on the grounds that they were a type or a shadow of things superseded in the New Covenant.

In conclusion, while the Church Fathers displayed a vehemence and uniformity in their antagonism of instrumental music, evidence shows the following: (1) their views developed after the first century; (2) their views could have been influenced by negative Greco-Romans views and associations with instrumental music; and (3) their opposition was almost exclusively focused on instrumental music associated with pagan activities outside the church. Furthermore, the Church Fathers’ use of allegorical interpretation does not negate the validity of instrumental worship, and neither their understanding of instrumental worship as a divine concession, nor their view of instruments as “types” has any basis in Scripture. In this regard, the Church Fathers overlook the metanarrative of the Old Testament, which highlights instrumental worship as a desirable means of expressing and supporting praise which is never explicitly nor implicitly abolished in the New Testament. Finally, the New Testament Scriptures do not condemn instrumental worship, and little evidence exists that the first generation of church leaders condemned instrumental worship.

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<sup>31</sup> Barber, “A Case for the Continuation of Musical Instruments,” 9.

When Jesus said in John 4:23-24 that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,” and “those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth,” he did not mean that worship will become a kind of disembodied experience in the church era or that spiritual worship was a New Testament innovation. God desired spiritual worship throughout Scripture, as seen when Jesus articulates the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,” quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5. Authentic worship has always been spiritual in nature. Instead, Jesus proclaimed that the geographic and ethnic focus of authentic worship would move from the Jewish Temple to Himself. More importantly, although authentic worship is spiritual in nature, it inevitably necessitates a physical manifestation: singing, clapping, bowing, weeping, baptizing, shouting, reading, taking communion, giving a tithe, or giving time. Paul underlines the physical manifestation of spiritual worship when he writes, “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). Even the mundane actions of getting out of bed and going to corporate worship require physical activity. Such activities are the outward manifestation of an inward spiritual reality. The Church Fathers were correct in seeing New Testament worship as spiritual, but they erred in concluding that instrumental worship was therefore incompatible with expressing spiritual worship.

My vision for the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra is that they understand that instrumental worship is not a program invented in the last fifty years to increase congregational engagement, or for community outreach, or to simply provide another “activity” for people to do at church. Instead, instrumental ministry has deep roots in Scripture where it is consistently shown as a desirable means of accompanying and expressing worship. Instrumental worship is a physical means of expressing a spiritual reality with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

## Instrumental Worship as Creation Praise

In considering a theology of instrumental worship, the first issue that must be addressed is “how does it work?” In other words, how does an inherently abstract medium serve worship? If we define worship as our response to the revelation of God’s character and his redemptive acts, then how can the non-verbal activity of instrumental music support God’s revelation and our response? How can a medium incapable of propositional truth support an activity which is so dependent on it? Part of the answer to this question is found in Psalm 19 and Romans 1. Psalm 19:1-4 begins, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

The creation declares the glory of God without words; without propositional truth. Yet, the psalmist says that creation “pours out speech” and “reveals knowledge.” What is the psalmist trying to communicate by personifying nature? The psalmist depicts the majesty, beauty, complexity, and variety found in creation as pointing to the creator and his infinite creativity. The “words” of creation are heard “to the end of the world” (v. 4) so that the whole world must accept the existence of a Sovereign Creator to whom they are accountable. Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, underlines the same truth: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom 1:19-20).

Best comments, “It speaks of God’s handiwork as a message of the existence of a glorious Creator rather than a message describing the Creator attribute by attribute.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, creation points to its Creator through its abstract beauty, complexity, and

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<sup>32</sup> Harold Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1994), 45.

skill instead of through a theological treatise. Theologians refer to the testimony of creation as general revelation.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Scripture is considered special revelation: a verbal, propositional disclosure of God’s character, will, and actions.<sup>34</sup> Instrumental music mimics general revelation in displaying the creativity of the composer and the skill of the instrumentalist in the same manner in which creation displays the creativity and a skill of God: through its abstract variety, complexity, beauty, majesty, and craftsmanship. Systematic Theologian Wayne Grudem writes, “It is man himself, created in the image of God, who most abundantly bears witness to the existence of God . . . such an incredibly intricate, skillful, communicative living creature could only have been created by an infinite, all-wise Creator.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the beauty of instrumental music refers back to the ultimate Composer, even if the human composer is in a state of rebellion against Him. Goldingay remarks, “The splendor of sun, moon, stars, and planets implies the splendor of the one whose hands made them, like a craft-worker.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the splendor of instrumental music implies the creativity of a composer or a performer, who in turn mirrors the *imago Dei*, intentionally or not.

Instrumental music, like the splendor of creation, requires the context of scriptural truth to fully bring the character of God into focus. Best points out, “If we want to know who the musician really is and what he or she believes, we should go to him or her to observe and listen. The music cannot tell us, even if the music maker wants it [the

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<sup>33</sup> Theologian Wayne Grudem defines general revelation: “General revelation includes both the revelation of God that comes through nature (see Ps. 19:1-6; Acts 14:17) and the revelation of God that comes through the inner sense of right and wrong in every person’s heart (Rom. 2:15). These kinds of revelation are nonverbal in form.” Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 65.

<sup>34</sup> Grudem’s defines special revelation as “God’s words addressed to specific people, including the words of the Bible.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1703.

<sup>35</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 177.

<sup>36</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Downers Grove, IL: Baker, 2006), 1:287.

music] to; it is limited to declaring itself and pointing to its maker.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, instrumental worship compliments special revelation in a manner similar to general revelation. Therefore, if non-verbal creatures, inanimate objects, and abstract processes of creation can declare the glory of God (Ps 148), how much more can sanctified, devoted, and skilled musicians proclaim the glory of God through the non-verbal medium of instrumental music? A church orchestra is an aural microcosm of the abstract sounds of creation—melodic, percussive, harmonic—purposefully united in skillfully manipulating the spectrum of sound for the praise of His glory.

While instrumental worship is a reflection of creation praise, it also has the ability to reinforce or highlight propositional truth. Best notes that since music is “the most abstract of all the art forms, the least capable of ‘saying’ anything outside itself, [it is] therefore the most open to associational meaning.”<sup>38</sup> The ability to take on associational meaning allows music to amplify the explicit meaning found in special revelation.

First Chronicles 25:1 describes David setting apart “the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals.” As discussed in chapter 2, the Levites proclaimed truth drawn from the Torah, which was then supported by instrumental accompaniment. The biblical truth imbued the instrumental accompaniment with the associational meaning to which Best refers. The instrumental accompaniment would have reinforced the proclamation of the truth and also served as an aural cue to remind the listeners of the truths of Temple worship whenever they heard such music.

The point is not that instrumental worship was required for the truth of Scripture to have a spiritual impact. Neither does 1 Chronicles 25 infer that instrumental music mediates God’s truth or His presence. Only Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can

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<sup>37</sup> Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 157.

fulfill those roles. But music—and buildings, beautiful artwork, chairs, HVAC systems, and good acoustics—may create an environment that helps to focus the mind and eliminates unnecessary distractions. In the same way an instrumental score intensifies the drama of a movie script, instrumental worship can intensify the meaning of a text or the gravitas of a lyric.

Since music is a temporal medium, it develops over time, which sets it apart from other mediums that might have associational meaning. For example, incense, artwork, or architecture may carry associational meaning, but they do not develop over time. For this reason, instrumental music is especially conducive to supporting the development of a plot, a line of reasoning, or an emotional evolution, even while it remains abstract. Without the scriptural worldview, propositional truth, and redemptive story provided by special revelation, abstract instrumental music can only provide a type of general revelation at best, and a temporary emotional high at worst. However, within the context and content of scriptural truth, abstract instrumental worship provides a prophetic intensification in the sense of 1 Chronicles 25:1.

### **Instrumental Worship as Creation Mandate**

Another way in which instrumental worship is an important part of glorifying God is that it provides a unique means of fulfilling the so-called creation mandate in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

The *creation mandate* is the term given by theologians to the divine commission to humanity to “have dominion” over the earth (v. 26), and to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (v. 28). Professor Eugene Merrill explains,

“The human race is charged with the responsibility of filling the earth and having dominion over it and everything on it, a responsibility frequently described as the creation mandate.”<sup>39</sup> One of the primary biblical roles of humanity, in other words, is to take the raw materials of creation and cultivate them for the glory of God.

A scriptural stewardship of the earth involves creativity in all spheres of culture. Although agricultural stewardship is typically the focus of stewardship in the Genesis account, the same passage hints at a broader array of cultural creativity when it describes the four rivers flowing out of Eden: “The first is the Pishon. It is the one flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there” (Gen 2:11,12). Mentioning valuable commodities such as gold and precious stones points to the day when the technology will be invented to extract them, and the craftsmanship will be developed to turn them into things of value and beauty. Underlining the concept of a comprehensive stewardship of the earth—not just an agrarian stewardship—Genesis 4:20-22 describes humanity’s endeavors in building cities, cultivating livestock, playing music, and forging instruments of bronze and iron. Even in his fallen state man cannot help but exercise stewardship of the earth, creating new things in every area of culture. Richard Mouw uses the term *cultural mandate* which corresponds to the term *creation mandate*:

When God created all things in the beginning, he appointed the first man and woman to be stewards over the earth's resources. He told them to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). The command to “fill” the earth here is not merely a divine request that Adam and Eve have a lot of babies. The earth was also to be “filled” by the broader patterns of their interactions with nature and with each other. They would bring order to the Garden. . . . This is the kind of “filling” that some Christians have had in mind when they have labeled this command in Genesis 1—helpfully, I think—“the cultural mandate.” God placed human beings in his creation in order to introduce a cultural “filling” in ways that conformed to his divine will.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Eugene Merrill, “Image of God,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament—Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 443.

<sup>40</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 35.

Instrumental music fulfills the creation mandate in at least three ways. First, mankind cultivates the raw materials of creation—wood, metal, skin, reeds, or even electronics—to create simple or sophisticated instruments. Second, individuals nurture their talent to hone the skill necessary to use the instruments to produce beautiful sound. Third, composers or arrangers organize the raw materials of sound waves into uniquely temporal, abstract art forms that instrumentalists play. In summary, instrumental music combines woodworking, metallurgy, technology, acoustics, and electronics with abstract reasoning, emotional engagement, time, talent, and skill to cultivate the raw acoustical materials of creation. Therefore, instrumental worship combines aspects of creation praise with elements of the creation mandate.

The complexity, craftsmanship, and beauty of instrumental music mimics the testimony of creation even while it fulfills the divine mandate for humanity to exercise dominion over the earth. Perhaps these concepts clarify why instrumental worship is almost irrepressible: Humanity, fallen or redeemed, has a divinely ordained, insatiable desire to create and worship; therefore, it cannot restrain itself in using instrumental music to express worship because instrumental worship fulfills the creation mandate through creation praise. Instrumental worship underscores special revelation of the Creator through creation praise even while it fulfills the creation mandate. Thus, a church orchestra worships the Creator in a uniquely multi-faceted manner. A manner that combines the divine calling of worship with the divine calling of the creation mandate, and a manner in which the intensification of special revelation occurs through a type of general revelation.

### **Orchestral Ministry in Today's Church**

The principles of instrumental worship found in Scripture remain valid for today's church orchestra ministries. Worship should reflect an investment of resources, time, and talent commensurate with the size, resources, and talent available in churches. A church orchestra should understand that it is not merely an extension of a personal



hobby or a liturgical showcase for local talent. An orchestral ministry should accomplish several scriptural goals in the context of a local church worship.

### **Acoustic and Visual Energy**

An orchestra provides a unique type of sonic energy that intensifies musical worship. Certainly this was one of the reasons choirs and orchestras were involved in large celebrations in the Old Testament. A large space with a large gathering of people is enhanced by the sonic energy an orchestra provides. Could Solomon have dedicated his Temple without 120 trumpets? Of course, but 120 trumpets provide a massive acoustic reinforcement in a large gathering of people. While a large ensemble offers a unique aural intensity, a solo instrument, skillfully played, offers another type of aural intensity, often used to highlight a poignant or an intimate moment in worship. This emotional intensification is at least part of the meaning of “prophetic” nature of instrumental worship mentioned in 1 Chronicles 25:1, 3. When used properly, instruments bring an emotional amplification to corporate worship, underline a theological line of reasoning, or heighten the gravitas of a great truth.

An orchestra also provides a unique visual energy. Consider again the dedication of Solomon’s temple. While the sonic energy of 120 trumpets plus cymbals, harps, and lyres described in 2 Chronicles 5 created enormous acoustical energy, the visual image was equally compelling. A large group of “trained and skilled” (1 Chron 25:7 NIV) instrumentalists working together to edify the large group presents a picture of sacrifice and service dedicated to the larger cause of corporate worship. When Ezra and Nehemiah dedicated the Jerusalem wall by assembling a large orchestra and antiphonal choirs marching around the city in opposite directions before meeting at the Temple, their proceedings certainly evoked a sense of visual grandeur appropriate for such a momentous occasion. Such aural and visual expressions of worship are not concessions to the infantile weakness of Old Testament saints, but are instead a wholistic response to a glorious and gracious God, an intentional endeavor to exploit every resource available to

worship Him, and a full-orbed fulfillment of the injunction to “let all creation rejoice before the Lord (Ps 96:13).

In the New Testament context, the visual impact of a church orchestra takes on added significance. Most modern church orchestras consist of volunteer instrumentalists, whereas the Temple orchestra consisted of professional, full-time priests. A group of lay people leading worship with instruments demonstrates the New Testament priesthood of believers in a powerfully visible way, a contrast to the instrumental worship in the Tabernacle and Temple that seems to have been reserved for the professional priesthood.<sup>41</sup> God intended that the whole nation of Israel become a “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6), not just the tribe of Levites. According to 2 Peter 2:9, that intention has become reality, therefore, a modern church orchestra allows believers to fulfill one of the roles previously restricted to the Levites in formal worship. When visitors come to our church and ask, “How much do you pay your orchestra members?,” and then find out that they are volunteers, it is a testimony to the dedication of the orchestra members to the church and a visual demonstration of the priesthood of believers.

### **Lay Worship Leadership**

An orchestra ministry allows a larger number of lay people to be directly involved in leading worship, which in turn helps make the worship a more authentic expression of the local body of believers. Instead of a church trying to manufacture or impose a style of worship on its community, a volunteer church orchestra creates a worship environment which is an expression of its community. Paul describes

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<sup>41</sup> Instrumental worship performed by non-Levites seems to only occur in more spontaneous worship settings, such as the Song of Miriam in Exod 15, Saul meeting the prophets with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre in 1 Sam 10, or David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem with lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals in 2 Sam 6. Non-Levites do not appear to be involved in instrumental worship in the formal services and festivals at the Tabernacle or Temple.

congregational involvement in 1 Corinthians 14, encouraging active participation of church members in a variety of ways, and in an orderly fashion:

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. (vv. 26-31). But all things should be done decently and in order (v. 40).

An orchestra follows Paul's principles by allowing multiple members to contribute to the ministry of worship "decently and in order," one of Paul's main criteria. Instrumental (and choral) worship uniquely enables large groups of lay people to be involved in worship leadership, not just a few professionals.

### **Intergenerational Worship**

Another benefit of an orchestra ministry is that it can allow a cross-section of the church to be involved in worship leadership. Orchestras typically have members from a wide variety of ages and backgrounds. The WBC Orchestra, for example, consists of 20 male and 22 female participants over the last year. The average age is 45, with the youngest being 14 and the oldest at 86. Twenty-one members are age 50 or above and 15 members are age 30 or below. Six members are retired, while 9 members are in high school or college. The WBO therefore represents an unusual cross-section of the church working together to enhance congregational worship, a highly visible component of the church's identity. They present a microcosm of the body of Christ: people of different backgrounds, generations, cultures, and ethnicities united by their devotion to Christ and his church. A church orchestra reinforces a model of church life beyond gathering with "my" age group or focusing on "my" needs. An authentic church orchestra is united around the gospel instead of individual members' preferences. The goals are to glorify God through the edification of the church and the intensification of worship.

Church orchestras provide a unique cross-generational ministry that actively benefits the entire church. In particular, student ministries often have no avenue of involving talented teenage instrumentalists in leading worship unless they play a rhythm instrument. A church orchestra side-steps this barrier to musical involvement. Second, involvement in a church orchestra provides a means for students to continue in church ministry when they graduate from high school. In light of multiple studies which show that high schoolers are dropping out of church at an alarming rate when they graduate, ongoing engagement in church ministry is an important factor in keeping college and young adult church members involved.<sup>42</sup> Large-scale instrumental worship is unique in that it can bring people of different generations and cultures together in supporting corporate worship. A church orchestra is a visible symbol of the unity and diversity of the body of Christ on display for the church and the world to see.

### **Worship as Stewardship**

Furthermore, a church orchestra directly impacts the worship life of a church. It is not ancillary program unrelated to church life, but instead it brings a significant intensification to corporate worship through the investment of time and talent of the church members. In this sense, it is “organic,” as it allows the church’s own people to contribute to the worship life of the congregation. A church orchestra connects people to serve the church in a tangible way, and allows the church (both orchestra members and non-orchestra members) to see that using one’s talents for the Lord and the edification of the church is a God-ordained means of stewardship. Players learn that musical talent (or any kind of talent) should not be compartmentalized outside their life of faith. In

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<sup>42</sup> Pew Research reports, Only about one-in-three Millennials say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month. Roughly two-thirds of Millennials (64%) attend worship services a few times a year or less often, including about four-in-ten who say they seldom or never go. Indeed, there are as many Millennials who say they “never” attend religious services (22%) as there are who say they go at least once a week (22%). ( Pew Research, “In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>)

particular, church orchestras present an opportunity for young people to realize that what they do in marching band, their community orchestra, or their private music lessons is a God-given gift to be used for his glory and the edification of his people.

Playing in a church orchestra fleshes out the biblical concept of whole-life stewardship of one's abilities. In other words, involvement in a church orchestra goes beyond the sacrifice of financial resources to something much more difficult—the stewardship of time and talent, things which are more valuable in an affluent and over-committed culture. Involvement in a church orchestra represents a sacrificial investment in the worship life of the church. The priestly ministry of a church orchestra offers a commitment of service, time, and talent to edify the church. On the one hand, playing in a church orchestra is a very personal avenue of worship, but on the other hand the two primary purposes of a church orchestra are to facilitate worship for others and to serve the prophetic ministry of the Word to others. A church orchestra presents a picture of service—it does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the body.

### **Full-Orbed Worship**

One way to define worship is a rhythm of revelation and response. God reveals himself through revelation, and his people respond in praise, awe, delight, love, and obedience. Jesus describes such a full-orbed response in Matthew 22:37 when he identifies the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Instrumental worship seems to provide a unique avenue of response by engaging the whole person intellectually, physically, and emotionally.

Furthermore, instrumental worship allows a group of skilled individuals to worship simultaneously, even as they support a larger group of worshipers corporately. One reason why corporate musical worship is so powerful is because it allows large groups to easily rehearse the same truth in unison, and singing amplifies the sonic energy of the voice, compared to speaking. Adding instrumental participants not only increases the

sonic energy of the gathering, but also allows instrumentalists to engage a different aspect of their being, even while it supports the involvement of the rest of the group. In this light, the expansive use of instrumental worship throughout the Old Testament is understandable: it encourages a more full-orbed expression of praise both individually and corporately.

The orchestra in today's church has a high calling. Instrumental worship springs from the creation mandate and uses a type of creation praise to intensify the prophetic proclamation of the Word. In Scripture, instrumental worship encompasses impromptu worship gatherings as well as highly organized settings, both intimate and grandiose. It underscores meditation, intensifies proclamation, and accompanies every conceivable emotion. It is both a support for corporate praise and a means of individual worship. It elevates lay leadership in a type of priestly service, presenting a cross-section of the body working together to edify the church. It offers a means of personal stewardship and investment in the church, benefitting the whole body even while it generates an authentic musical culture from within the body. It points forward to the day when earthly and heavenly orchestras will be united in the antiphonal symphony of a new creation. Church orchestras should see themselves as filling these biblical roles and pursuing these biblical purposes.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the preparation and implementation of the ministry project at Whitesburg Baptist Church (WBC). The purpose of the project was to increase the biblical understanding of instrumental worship ministry at WBC. The eight-week project took place from September 1 2020, through October 20, 2020.

#### **Target Group**

The target group for the project consisted of people involved in the instrumental ministry of WBC. Participants were briefed on the scope of the project through emails and announcements during regular rehearsals. The youngest participant was twenty-three years of age and the oldest was eighty years old. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all activities were carried out online using Zoom Meeting, Google Forms, and email. Participation was voluntary.

#### **Project Implementation**

The ministry project had three goals. The first goal was to assess the current level of scriptural understanding of instrumental worship among the members of the WBO. The second goal was to write a curriculum which addressed any gaps in the scriptural understanding of instrumental worship among the members of the WBO. The third goal was to increase the biblical understanding of instrumental worship in the instrumental ministry.

To reach the first goal, I designed a pre-project survey which tested the participants' knowledge of biblical instrumental ministry. Participants completed the online survey through Google Forms, and the results of the survey were used to create a

curriculum to address areas where the participants' understanding of instrumental worship was weak or limited. The participants assigned themselves a four-digit ID number in order to match pre- and post-project surveys and to ensure anonymity. Potential participants were briefed on the scope of the project through emails and announcements during regular rehearsals. Twenty-six members of the WBO participated in the survey and the class. All classes were conducted via Zoom meetings. Classes were recorded and posted with class notes to a DropBox folder for those who had scheduling conflicts.

Analyzing the survey results revealed that while most participants had a general idea that Scripture supported instrumental worship, few had a thorough knowledge of the subject. While 80 percent of the participants "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could name at least one Scripture on instrumental worship, only 30 percent thought they could name multiple passages on instrumental worship. Fifty-four percent of the group were unsure (either somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed) if instrumental worship was associated with idolatry and hypocrisy. Sixty-five percent were uncertain if synagogue worship included instruments. Seventy-three percent of the participants were unclear about the views of the church fathers on instrumental worship. A large segment (80 percent) of the group considered their involvement in instrumental ministry as an act of worship or service, and 70 percent regarded their playing as an act of discipleship. Most of the group (65 percent) did not feel they had a good understanding of why some denominations forbid instrumental worship, and only 23 percent of the group "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they would be confident in explaining a biblical view of instrumental worship to a member of such a denomination. The survey results indicated that while the group assumed scriptural support for instrumental worship, they lacked a clear understanding of the biblical support for its use in the New Testament church.

### **Curriculum Development and Evaluation**

Once the survey was complete, I developed a curriculum designed to address gaps in the participants' understanding of instrumental worship. The curriculum was



based on a biblical theology of instrumental worship developed in the first three chapters of this project. The curriculum was evaluated by a panel of four experts: Camp Kirkland, a pioneer in church orchestra ministries; Brian L. Hedrick, who holds a Doctor of Worship Studies from the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies; Rick Stone, the senior minister of music at Whitesburg Baptist Church; and Darryl Craft, the senior pastor at Whitesburg Baptist Church. They read through the curriculum and filled out a six-point evaluation rubric. Once each point was graded with at least a “3” on a four-point scale, the curriculum was finalized.

### **Week 1 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in the Pentateuch**

Before the first class, participants were sent an outline of the subject matter that covered relevant Scriptures, key points, and leading questions. In the first lesson, class members were briefly reminded of the nature and expectations of the class, and then introduced to the topic of instrumental worship. The class then discussed the appearance of instrumental music in the Old Testament (Gen 4:19-22; 31:17) and its connection to the Creation Mandate. Second, the class walked through the early narratives of instrumental worship in Miriam’s Song (Gen 15:19-21), and God’s commissioning of the silver trumpets (Num 15:1-10). In the former, instrumental was spontaneous and assumed, while in the latter it was planned in detail and explicitly sanctioned by God. Significantly, instrumental music was used as accompaniment to the central redemptive event of the Old Testament and as a means of worship connected with the central location of worship. Finally, the class surveyed the brief accounts of instrumental worship from Joshua through 1 and 2 Samuel, noting connection points to the accounts of Miriam’s Song and the silver trumpets. In conclusion, participants were urged to consider their instrumental ministry in light of these examples. Biblical instrumental ministry is an authentic, divinely ordained response of worship, faith, and stewardship to the person and redemptive works of God.

## **Week 2 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in the Tabernacle and Temple**

In lesson 2, the class studied instrumental worship in the Tabernacle and Temple. The main point of discussion was the large-scale instrumental worship instituted by David and carried on by his successor, Solomon. The lesson contained several key principles regarding instrumental worship. (1) Instrumental worship was explicitly ordained by God through the prophets. It was not a creative innovation David conjured up because he happened to have a musical bent. (2) While instrumental worship was sometimes spontaneous in the Old Testament (such as in the procession of the Ark into Jerusalem), in the context of Temple worship, it was usually highly organized and led by skilled individuals. (3) Instrumental worship in the temple was described as not merely an accompaniment to worship, but as a prophetic ministry of the priests. (4) Authentic instrumental worship is motivated by a view of God as a good and glorious Lord. Consequently, it requires a spiritual and musical investment of resources, time, and talent. (5) Finally, instrumental worship is portrayed as an expression of spiritual renewal in the nation of Israel. Participants were challenged to consider their instrumental activities as a type of prophetic ministry requiring both musical and spiritual preparation. They were reminded that the focus of authentic instrumental worship is God and not the excellence of their musicianship or the extravagance of the instrumental ministry.

## **Week 3 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in the Psalms**

Lesson 3 surveyed how the Psalms highlight instrumental worship. First, the class was reminded that the Psalms illustrate how God's people bring every emotion before God in humble yet honest prayer and praise. The prayers and praise in the Psalms are often presented in the context of instrumental worship. Specifically, instrumental worship is repeatedly implied, recommended, or modeled in the Psalms. The class first discussed the Hebrew terms *zamar* and *mizmor*, which are usually translated as "to sing" and "psalm," and appear a combined ninety-nine times in the Psalms. Both terms strongly imply the

use of instruments in the original Hebrew. Next, the class observed that eight Psalms recommend the use of instruments in their superscripts. The variety of actions portrayed in these Psalms include lamentation, meditation, petitionary prayer, and the fulfilling of vows, reflecting the variety of ways in which instruments can support worship. Third, the class examined Psalm 33, which commands the skillful use of instruments. In this Psalm, instruments are not presented as a mere support to praise but as a means of praise.

In Psalms 61 and 71, the class discussed how the psalmist models instrumental praise, using it to fulfill vows and as part of a full-orbed worship response to the faithfulness of God. Psalm 108 was also examined as an example of instrumental music being used to witness to the surrounding peoples and nations. Finally, the class considered Psalm 150 as culmination of the Psalms. The Psalms begin with personal mediation and climax with a creation-wide celebration, utilizing every class of instruments: strings, winds, brass, and percussion. Instrumental worship is considered a natural, welcome component of worship in the Psalms. To conclude, I challenged the class to consider their instrumental praise as a means of supporting many different facets of worship, such as celebration, lamentation, meditation, grief, repentance, witness, and exhortation.

#### **Week 4 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in the Prophets and Second Temple**

In lesson 4 the class discussed how instrumental worship is both condemned and modelled in the prophets and the second temple period. We considered how Isaiah and Amos harshly rebuked the Israelites' use of instrumental worship in their God-ordained services and assemblies. God's anger is not provoked by the use of instruments but by the hypocritical lifestyle of the worshipers; their hearts were far from God and they showed no concern for the welfare of God's people. Just as the Old Testament prophets called the Israelites to live lives of integrity, so too the New Testament calls instrumental worshipers to live such a life. In other words, the non-verbal role of church instrumentalists does not excuse them from a life of godly devotion. The class studied the

negative example of instrumental worship found in the account of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. Daniel 3 highlights how the impressive orchestral forces, the golden idol, and Nebuchadnezzar's ego take center stage in false worship. Also examined were the positive examples of instrumental worship in the prophets, such as 1 Samuel 10:5, 2 Kings 3, and Habakkuk 3. These examples show instrumental music as an accompaniment to worship (similar to the Psalms), or as an intensification of worship (similar to 1 Chron 25).

The class reviewed instrumental worship in Ezra and Nehemiah, noting how the leadership of Israel did not hesitate to reinstitute instrumental worship "according to the command of David and his son Solomon" (Neh 12:45) after the return from exile. In particular, the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem was a spectacular display of instrumental and choral worship, reminding the nation of Solomon's temple dedication. The class also discussed the intertestamental period, using accounts from 1 Maccabees and the Mishnah. The discussions illustrated that instrumental music continued as a regular expression of worship for God's people after the exile and until the time of Christ.

In conclusion, the class was challenged to be aware of hypocrisy in their own lives and guard against idolizing either the spectacle of worship or the excellence of worship. Instrumental worshipers should pursue the glory of God through their music and their daily living. The prophets unequivocally proclaim the importance of integrating worship and lifestyle to the church instrumentalist.

### **Week 5 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in the New Testament**

Lesson 5 examined instrumental worship in the New Testament. I asked the class to consider why the New Testament had so few explicit references to instrumental worship. The main answer is the cultural context of the early church. The church was a poor, impoverished minority sect that experienced regular persecution. New Testament worship was hardly conducive to an activity that would announce itself to the

surrounding world. Another answer is that while instrumental worship is not explicitly mentioned in the Gospels or Epistles, it is implied in Paul's use of the Greek term *psallo* in Romans 18:49, 1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:18-19, and in James' use of the same term in James 5:13. Such passages at least imply an affirmation of instrumental worship and seem to contradict the notion that the New Testament forbids it.

The class also studied passages in Revelation depicting instrumental worship. In Revelation 5, the twenty-four elders play harps at one of the most significant moments in redemptive history: when the Lamb is declared "worthy" and takes the scroll from the Father and begins to open the seals. The significance of the event can hardly be overstated. The celestial beings called elders seem to fulfill a priestly roll in presenting the prayers of the saints and in performing instrumental worship. Their ministry indicates that Old Testament instrumental praise was not a shadow of things fulfilled in Christ but a paralleling of a heavenly reality. Instrumental worship is not fulfilled in Christ, it is redeemed in Christ.

The class also discussed Revelation 14:1-3, where John describes a "voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpist playing on the harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders." Commentators like Hamilton and Beale believe that the 144,000 redeemed are playing the harps, not merely sounding like harps with their voices, especially since these same redeemed play harps in the next chapter. In chapter 15, John explicitly describes the redeemed as playing harps and singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Therefore, the celestial elders are joined by the redeemed of the Lamb in an antiphonal harp choir, echoing Old Testament priestly worship while modeling the New Testament priesthood of all believers. I concluded by encouraging the class to consider how their ministry connects to the Old Testament role of instrumental worship, the New Testament idea of a priesthood of all believers, and perfect instrumental ministry of the twenty-four elders of Revelation. The

role of an instrumental ministry is not to showcase the talents of its members but to support the proclamation of the glory of God.

### **Week 6 Lesson: Instrumental Worship and the Early Church**

Lesson 6 focused on the critical views of the Church Fathers concerning instrumental worship, the cultural influences that probably played a role in their views, and the main arguments the Church Fathers used against instrumental music. The class first discussed how the Temple, the synagogues, and the Greco-Roman culture might have played a role in the views of the Church Fathers on instrumental worship. In particular, the discussion highlighted the cultural context of the early church and how it would have been extremely hostile to use and development of instrumental worship. The main point of the conversation was that the Church Fathers seemed to have adapted the worst suspicions of Greek thought regarding instrumental worship while rejecting any positive attitudes that might have carried over from the Old Testament. The second section of the class discussed the Church Fathers' objections to instrumental music; they strongly associated instrumental music with licentious behavior practiced at weddings, banquets, and pagan worship. The third section of the class examined the three main arguments the Church Fathers used in rejecting instruments: (1) allegorical interpretation, (2) the concession argument, and (3) the shadows and types argument. Each argument was explained and counter arguments were offered and explored. The class concluded by discussing why the modern church should take the views of the Church Fathers very seriously since they helped define orthodox views on the deity of Christ and the Trinity. On the subject of instrumental worship, however, they seemed to have succumbed to cultural mores while ignoring the clear testimony of the Old Testament.

## **Week 7 Lesson: The Biblical Significance of Instrumental Worship**

Lesson 7 examined three aspects of instrumental worship: (1) how it expresses spiritual worship, (2) how it relates to creation praise, and (3) how it fulfills the creation mandate. In discussing the spiritual nature of instrumental worship, the class considered that while Jesus spoke of worshipping in spirit and truth in John 4, his point was not that worship would become pure, disembodied meditation which does not involve physical expression. God's people still sing, clap, raise their hands, kneel, or shout. Instrumental worship is simply one more means of expressing praise with one's body. Authentic worship—in the Old Testament and New Testament—produces an outward physical manifestation of an inward spiritual reality.

The class also discussed how the abstract medium of instrumental music relates to Christian worship, which is heavily dependent on verbal truth. The answer is found in two facets of instrumental music. First, instrumental worship mimics Creation Praise (Pss 19:1-4, 148:3-5; Rom 1:19-20), which declares the glory of God indirectly through its beauty, complexity, majesty and craftsmanship. If inanimate objects and non-verbal processes of creation can declare the praise of God, then how much more can a group of sanctified, devoted, and skilled musicians declare his glory through the medium of instrumental music? Second, instrumental music possesses the ability to reinforce or highlight propositional truth. In the same way an instrumental score intensifies the drama of a movie script, instrumental worship can intensify the meaning of a text or the profundity of a lyric. In both cases, instrumental worship requires the framework of biblical truth to fulfill its potential in corporate worship. Church instrumental ministries are anchored in the purpose of supporting, amplifying, and highlighting the revelation of God and the response of God's people to that revelation.

Finally, the class discussed the idea of instrumental worship as a fulfillment of the Creation Mandate, that is the scriptural stewardship of creation. Genesis 1 shows that mankind's "filling of the earth" (Gen 1:26-28) was not limited to procreation or agricultural

endeavors but involved all spheres of culture including technology and the arts. In this sense, instrumental music involves multiple levels of stewardship: (1) The development of the technologies and raw materials necessary to create instruments. (2) The nurturing of individual talent and skill required to play an instrument with excellence. (3) The stewardship of composers and arrangers who organize sound and instruments into acoustical structures that delight and surprise and enhance occasion for which they were created. In closing, participants were challenged to consider their music ministry as a fulfillment of the Creation Mandate which uses a type of Creation Praise to express spiritual worship in the framework of scriptural revelation.

### **Week 8 Lesson: Instrumental Worship in Today's Church**

In lesson 8, the class discussed how instrumental worship supports worship in today's church. The first point of discussion was how an instrumental ministry provides an acoustic and visual impact to corporate worship. The class studied how Solomon used a large instrumental ensemble to provide an acoustic intensification in corporate worship and considered how modern orchestra ministries offer a similar kind of intensification. While instrumental intensification is not mandatory, it seems to be a welcome and expected addition to large-scale corporate worship in Scripture. The visual aspect of a large instrumental ensemble also delivers a type of visual intensification of worship. A group of instrumentalists united in worship, offering up their time and talent, and supporting corporate worship presents a picture of the unity of the people of God and the priesthood of all believers. In particular, having lay people involved in a church orchestra follows Paul's encouragement in 1 Corinthians 14:40 to allow as many people as possible to contribute to the ministry of worship "decently and in order." A modern church orchestra uniquely allows a large number of lay people to be involved in worship while maintaining orderliness and clarity of purpose.



The class also reflected on the ability of a modern orchestra to allow intergenerational leadership in corporate worship. Church orchestras can unite multiple generations in joint ministry like few other ministries. They allow young people to directly serve the worship life of the church, using their personal gifts and talents. Furthermore, such involvement fosters an understanding that every part of life—one's time, talent, and resources—should be subject to biblical stewardship. Sacrificial ministry for the church should receive priority along with musical activities outside the church. Finally, instrumental ministry provides a means for young adults to remain engaged in church ministry once they leave the student ministry.

The class discussed the ability of instrumental worship to engage the mind, the body, the emotions, and the will in full-orbed worship according to Matthew 22:37. Instrumental worshipers engage in personal worship even as they encourage and amplify corporate worship. The class considered how Christian musicians should see their playing as act of stewardship, whether playing in a church or secular setting. In both cases, they should seek to honor God with their talent, actions, and relationships. I also challenged the class to understand the difference between excellence and perfectionism in music ministry. Excellence requires that one does the very best he can with time, talent, and resources, each according to his own ability. One should do it for the glory of God and the edification of the church. Perfectionism, on the other hand, is the idolatrous pursuit of perfection for one's ego's sake, regardless of the cost to the witness of the church or its negative impact on relationships. Perfectionism often equivocates the spectacle of musical or technical perfection with the power and presence of God and is equally at home in any worship style. I concluded by challenging the class to pursue both musical and spiritual excellence in their role as worship leaders in the church.

### **Post-Project**

After the final class, participants were given four weeks to review any missed lessons and complete the post-project survey. Once the post-project survey was closed,

pre- and post-project PIN numbers were matched, which confirmed that twenty-six of the original twenty-eight participants completed the course. The results were tallied, analyzed, and compared with the pre-project survey to measure any change in the participants' understanding of a biblical instrumental ministry.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to provide a biblical theology for the instrumental ministry of the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra, equipping its members to understand the role of instrumental worship in the church. The three goals of the project were to assess, address, and increase the scriptural understanding of instrumental worship among the members of the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra. The pre-project survey assessed the scriptural knowledge of the participants, a curriculum was developed to address the gaps in knowledge of the participants, and an eight-week class was taught to increase the knowledge of the participants. Finally, a post-project survey was administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching. My personal prayer is that the participants would not merely “fill in the gaps” in their knowledge of instrumental worship, but that they would develop a scriptural framework for instrumental worship and their ministerial role as instrumental worship leaders.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

In this chapter I evaluate the project in light of its purpose and goals while reflecting on the personal and theological implications for ministry at Whitesburg Baptist Church.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to provide a biblical theology of instrumental worship for the members of Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra, equipping its members to understand the role of instrumental worship in the church. Whitesburg Baptist Church has been in existence for over fifty years and has a reputation as a conservative Southern Baptist Church providing multiple programs and activities for its members and the surrounding community. While the orchestra ministry has been in existence since the early 1980s, the church lacked a clear, biblical theology of instrumental worship. Therefore, developing a scriptural understanding of instrumental ministry was important for the future of the ministry. The project allowed me to spend considerable time formulating, teaching, and discussing a theology of instrumental with WBO members.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The three goals of the project were to assess, address, and increase the scriptural understanding of instrumental worship among the members of the Whitesburg Baptist Orchestra.

The first goal of the project was to assess the knowledge and affection of WBO members with regard to the place of instrumental music in corporate worship. This goal was reached by administering the pre-project survey. The survey revealed that while the

participants had a general idea of the validity of instrumental worship in the church, they also had gaps in the biblical background of instrumental worship and the role of instrumental worship. In particular, most of the group (65 percent) did not know why some denominations forbid instrumental worship, and only 23 percent of the group “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they would be confident in explaining a biblical view of instrumental worship to a member of such a denomination. I interpreted these results to mean that the group not only needed a broad overview of the biblical foundations of instrumental worship but also required insight into the historical controversies surrounding instrumental worship.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum on the biblical theology of instrumental music. This goal was reached by developing the curriculum to address the gaps in knowledge of the participants. The curriculum used the research from chapters 2 and 3 of this project to address the issues found in the pre-project survey. The curriculum consisted of four main areas of study: (1) a study of the major scriptures concerning instrumental worship; (2) an overview of the historical issues concerning instrumental worship; (3) an introduction to the concepts of the creation mandate and creation praise and how they relate to instrumental worship; and (4) a discussion of the role of instrumental worship in the church, and how it integrates stewardship, discipleship, and worship.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge and affections of the WBO members with regard to the place of instrumental music in public worship with specific attention to the spiritual formation of the instrumentalists. This goal was reached by teaching the curriculum to participants over eight sessions. Once the curriculum had been taught, a post-project survey was administered and matched to the pre-project survey by means of a four-digit PIN number. Out of 28 participants who started the course, 26 finished and were matched to the pre-project survey ensuring a valid comparison. The survey had 9 questions about the participants’ general biblical knowledge of instrumental

worship. Those questions were formulated using a six-point Likert scale in which “6” was the most favorable answer and “1” was the least favorable answer. In the pre-project survey, the average score for these questions was 36, whereas in the post-project survey, the average score for the same questions was 48. Assuming a level of significance of .05, a *t*-test comparing pre- and post-project results revealed a statistically significant difference ( $t_{(25)} = 4.35, p = .0001$ ) in the knowledge of the participants of the instrumental worship course. A second set of questions in the pre-and post-project survey focused on historical issues concerning instrumental worship. These questions used six-point Likert scale in which “1” was the most favorable answer and “6” the least favorable. When comparing the pre- and post-project answers from these questions, the results were not as obvious with the average scores rising only 4 points, from 25 to 29. Nevertheless, a paired *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference ( $t_{(25)} = 2.51, p = .0094$ ) in the pre- and post-project knowledge of the participants.

In particular, the post-project survey was less conclusive concerning New Testament views on instrumental worship. Before the teaching, 31 percent of participants understood that instrumental worship was only implied in the Epistles, whereas after the course, 58 percent of the participants were aware of this fact. Similarly, 39 percent of the class thought that instrumental worship was modeled in Revelation, while after the class, 62 percent knew this was the case. Participants were less clear about instrumental music in the Gospels and Acts. Before the teaching, 31 percent indicated that instrumental worship was neither commanded, implied, or modeled in the Gospels and Acts. After the teaching, that figure had only risen to 35 percent.

The post-project survey indicated that the participants understood the historic controversies around instrumental worship better after the class. In the pre-project survey, 73 percent were unsure (somewhat disagreed or somewhat agreed) if the Church Fathers encouraged instrumental worship, whereas after the teaching, 54 percent of participants strongly disagreed with the idea that the Church Fathers encouraged instrumental worship.

Similarly, before the class, 58 percent of participants “somewhat agreed” that the reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, unanimously supported instrumental worship, whereas after the teaching, 80 percent of participants either “strongly disagreed,” “disagreed,” or “somewhat disagreed” that the reformers unanimously supported instrumental worship. Both surveys indicated the participants strongly viewed their playing in church as an act of worship (81 percent pre-project to 86 percent post-project), discipleship (50 percent pre-project to 65 percent post-project) and service (81 percent pre-project to 85 percent post-project).

The most encouraging improvement between the pre- and post-project surveys was that before the project 65 percent of participants stated that they did not have a good understanding of why the Church of Christ forbids instrumental worship and 51 percent of the group would not feel confident explaining their views of biblical instrumental worship to a Church of Christ member. After the project, however, 69 percent of participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they understood the Church of Christ’s views on instrumental worship, and 92 percent of participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they would feel confident explaining their views of biblical instrumental worship.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The first strength of the project was that it allowed me to have extended interaction with the orchestra ministry to address the topic of worship. While I regularly spend time discussing worship in the orchestra ministry, time is limited by the necessity of preparing music for the next service or special event. The project allowed the group more time to interact, ask questions, and explore the topic of instrumental worship without the constraints of a typical worship schedule. The second strength was the large participation of orchestra members. While 42 members are on the orchestra roster, there are typically 20-25 regular players on a given Sunday morning. Having 26 players who completed the pre- and post-surveys suggested a strong commitment from the orchestra

ministry. Another strength of the project was the use of Zoom sessions. I originally planned on hosting live classes directly after rehearsals, but the Covid crisis forced me to utilize Zoom. In retrospect, I realize that using Zoom gave more time for the session, allowed more people to participate, and allowed people flexibility in their schedules as anyone could “catch-up” on missed sessions through automatic Zoom recordings.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One of the weaknesses in the project was the design of the pre- and post-survey. In retrospect, it could have been clearer on some of topics, and also better designed for statistical analysis. For example, the questions on New Testament views of instrumental worship seemed confusing, as there was little change between the pre- and post-survey results. In particular, the question of whether instruments were used in synagogues had more incorrect answers in the post-survey than the pre-survey. The phrasing of the questions concerning New Testament instrumental worship needed clarification or simplification.

Another weakness of the project was the implementation of Zoom meetings. While Zoom had its previously mentioned advantages, it also had drawbacks. As a teacher, using Zoom provided a less-than-optimal experience in terms of class discussion, interaction, and simply “reading the room.” Another weakness might have been the organization of the subject matter. Since the concepts of creation praise and the creation mandate provide a framework for instrumental worship, the discussion of those two topics should be moved to the beginning of the curriculum in future revisions.

### **What I Would Have Done Differently**

In retrospect, I would not have used anonymous surveys because anonymous surveys did not allow me to see who was going to participate before the class began. In other words, until we had our first Zoom meeting, I did not know who was going to participate, I only had a record of how many people completed the survey, but did not

know their identity until the Zoom sessions began. I would have preferred a few more high school students to participate, as well as some of the instrumentalists from the contemporary service. Another option might have been to invite a few MIDC members to the project for professional evaluation, as well as including a few non-instrumentalists. Feedback and interaction from both music professionals as well as non-musicians might have provided valuable insights. The involvement of MIDC members, however, would have required a means of separating their pre- and post-project surveys out from the WBO members, in order to evaluate the progress of the WBO members.

### **Theological Reflections**

The project allowed me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of biblical instrumental worship. In particular, I was amazed by the prevalence of instrumental worship in the Psalms, where it is implied, recommended, and modeled. At the outset of the project, I assumed that the Psalms would provide a rich source of supporting Scriptures, but I underestimated the depth and breadth of its advocacy for instrumental worship. I was also surprised by the broad implications of instrumental worship in Revelation, especially as I was initially apprehensive about the lack of support for instrumental worship in the New Testament. The passages found in Revelation, however few, were richly rewarding. The picture of celestial and terrestrial orchestras joining in antiphonal praise was extremely inspiring. Finally, the exploration of creation praise and the creation mandate provided an unexpected but welcome source of foundational material for a theology of instrumental worship. Creation praise helped me reconcile the abstract nature of instrumental music with the necessity of propositional truth in Christian worship, while the creation mandate helped me connect instrumental music to a biblical view of stewardship. Fleshing out the ramifications of both concepts as they related to instrumental praise had a profound impact on my thinking.

As a result of this project, I am better equipped to teach and challenge my orchestra with a scriptural model of instrumental worship. In the future, I hope to create a



series of mini-lessons derived from the project which will systematically communicate a biblical theology of instrumental worship to the WBO volunteers. My aim is to see a biblical understanding of instrumental ministry thoroughly integrated into the worship of Whitesburg Baptist Church.

### **Personal Reflections**

This project came at a transitional time in my ministry and family. I had two older children who entered college during the project. After multiple college trips, recitals, graduations, and even a wedding, both are now in grad school. In my professional ministry, our senior pastor retired after forty years of service. On the one hand, such circumstances were not the ideal environment to embark on a post-graduate degree, especially one that required six leveling courses. Yet I needed such a challenge to push me personally and professionally further into God's Word. Besides giving me a renewed enthusiasm for instrumental worship, it has also renewed my appreciation and joy in knowing and studying Scripture. I have even begun teaching one of the church's Life Groups as a result of my studies. This project reinvigorated my thirst for knowing, loving, and teaching God's Word.

### **Conclusion**

I am excited for the instrumental ministry at Whitesburg Baptist Church. We have transitioned to new pastoral leadership over the past two years; leadership that values excellence and scriptural faithfulness in worship. In spite of the challenges posed by Covid-19, church attendance and finances have held steady even while completing a comprehensive renovation of the sanctuary and the children's ministry space. Moreover, education and missions have brand new leadership. The project allowed me to engage the members of the WBO during a difficult time. While the Covid crisis was extremely detrimental to most instrumental ensembles, it became an excellent opportunity to enlarge the vision for instrumental ministry among WBO members even while our practical

ministry was limited. I look forward to the continued implementation of the principles embodied in the project for the glory of God and the edification of his people!

Praise him with trumpet sound;

    praise him with lute and harp!

Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!

Praise him with sounding cymbals;

    praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

    Praise the Lord! (Ps 150)

## APPENDIX 1

### BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF INSTRUMENTAL MINISTRY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The following instrument is the Instrumental Ministry Assessment (IMA). Some general questions are followed by a survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess each member's present level of theological understanding and confidence in understanding biblical instrumental worship.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF INSTRUMENTAL  
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the level of knowledge of a biblical instrumental worship. This research is being conducted by Timothy Bandy for purposes of training WBC instrumentalists in a biblical theology of worship. In this research, you will complete a survey which will help us determine the effectiveness of our training. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this Biblical Theology of Instrumental Ministry Assessment Survey, and signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will use a 4-digit code to identify your survey, the purpose of the 4-digit code is to be able to match pre- and post-surveys. Matching pre- and post-surveys helps ensure that we have meaningful results. Once surveys are matched, the results will be anonymized and totaled, and not used individually.

**Agreement to Participate for Minors**

You are being requested to give permission for a minor or member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a study designed to [describe the research purpose in the language of the participant]. This research is being conducted by [insert researcher name] for purposes of [describe the reason for the research, such as project research or dissertation research]. In this research, a person will [describe in simple terms what participants will be asked to do]. Any information provided will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will a person's name be reported, or a person's name identified with his or her responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and the person you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in this research if he or she desires.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF INSTRUMENTAL  
MINISTRY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

You will take a pre- and post-survey for this course. It is very important that we match the pre-project surveys with post-project surveys, so please make sure to use the same code for both pre- and post-surveys. Matching pre- and post-surveys helps ensure that we have meaningful results. Once surveys are matched, the results will be anonymized and totaled, and not used individually.

Please write down your code to use in the post-survey!

**Four Digit ID Code:**   \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

**Section 1: General Questions**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer or filling in the blank space provided.

1. Are you a follower of Jesus Christ?  
A. Yes\_\_\_\_  
B. No\_\_\_\_  
C. Not sure\_\_\_\_
  
2. Do you have a regular Bible reading plan?  
A. Yes\_\_\_\_  
B. No\_\_\_\_
  
3. Are you a member of Whitesburg Baptist Church?  
A. Yes\_\_\_\_  
B. No\_\_\_\_
  
4. How many years have you attended Whitesburg Baptist Church? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many years have you played in any church orchestra? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Briefly define worship using your own words or a verse or both.

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7. List any verses, passages, or biblical reasons you know of which would justify using instruments in corporate worship.
- a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Concept of Biblical/Historical Instrumental Worship

**Directions:** Circle your agreement to the statements using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

8. I can name at least one biblical passage on instrumental worship.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

9. I can name multiple biblical passages on instrumental worship.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

10. God commands his people to use instruments in worship.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

11. Instrumental music was a regular component of Tabernacle /Temple worship.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

12. David was directly instructed by prophets to organize his instrumental program for the Temple.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

13. Scripture informs us that the Temple musicians prophesied with their instruments.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

14. Biblical instrumental worship was always carefully planned and organized.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

15. Some biblical prophets used instruments to proclaim their message.

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

16. Instrumental worship often accompanied spiritual revival in Old Testament (OT).

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

17. Instrumental worship was only performed by priests in the Old Testament (OT).

SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

18. Instrumental worship is sometimes associated with hypocrisy and idolatry in the OT.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
19. Instrumental music was a regular component of synagogue worship.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
20. Is Instrumental worship commanded, implied, or modeled in the Gospels and Acts?  
Commanded\_\_\_    Implied\_\_\_    Modeled\_\_\_    None of the above\_\_\_
21. Is Instrumental worship commanded, implied, or modeled in the Epistles?  
Commanded\_\_\_    Implied\_\_\_    Modeled\_\_\_    None of the above\_\_\_
22. Is Instrumental worship commanded, implied, or modeled in the Revelation?  
Commanded\_\_\_    Implied\_\_\_    Modeled\_\_\_    None of the above\_\_\_
23. Instrumental worship was encouraged by many of the Church Fathers (the first generations of church leaders after the Apostles died).  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
24. The Protestant reformers, like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, unanimously supported instrumental worship.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
25. Instrumental music was a regular component of worship at Charles Spurgeon's church in London.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
26. Instrumental worship was commonplace in Baptist churches in before 1900.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

### **Section 3: Personal View of Instrumental Worship**

27. If I were new to the area, I would place a high priority in finding a church with an orchestra ministry so that I could be involved in such a ministry.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
28. I consider my instrumental playing for the church as an act of worship.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
29. I consider my instrumental playing for the church as an act of discipleship.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
30. I consider my instrumental playing for the church as an act of service.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
31. The orchestra ministry is one of the main ways I "plug in" at church.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
32. I have a good understanding of why the Church of Christ forbids instrumental worship.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

33. I would feel confident explaining to a Church of Christ member why I believe instrumental worship is biblical.

SD D DS AS A SA

34. I play in the orchestra primarily because I love playing and enjoy the fellowship.

SD D DS AS A SA



APPENDIX 2  
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of one minister of music, one senior pastor, one full-time church orchestra director, and one retired church orchestra director/arranger. This panel evaluated the course material to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

**INSTRUMENTAL WORSHIP CURRICULUM  
EVALUATION RUBRIC**

1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The content of the curriculum is theologically sound.					
The lessons are faithful to biblical principals of worship.					
The curriculum is relevant to issues in instrumental worship.					
The curriculum contains points of practical application.					
The curriculum is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the curriculum is clearly presented.					

Please include any additional comments regarding the curriculum below

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## ABSTRACT

### THE DEVELOPING ROLE OF THE INSTRUMENTAL MINISTRY AT WHITESBURG BAPTIST CHURCH IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
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The primary purpose of this project was to develop a biblical theology of instrumental worship for Whitesburg Baptist Church (WBC). The opening chapter outlines the development of orchestral worship in the SBC, the challenges of instrumental worship generally, and surveys the specific context of the WBC instrumental ministry. Chapter 2 develops a biblical theology of instrumental worship, surveying the Pentateuch, Davidic worship, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the New Testament. Chapter 3 establishes why a larger instrumental ministry can be significant in the life of a church, and answers the common objections to such a ministry. Chapter 4 develops a curriculum to be taught to the WBC Orchestra, and chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project.

VITA

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