

Study One: The Meaning of Worship

Introduction: The Need to Know The Nature of Worship

Today there is enormous confusion as to the nature of worship and the patterns we should use. It seems almost everyone has his or her idea of how we should worship. Often folk like worship in which they were brought up, but others seek new forms of expression in worship. Since worship is what all humans being do continually, then we must be clear about *how* we worship God *whom* we worship. Most of us worship from images which we possess in our minds, and if the image be wrong then the worship will also be wrong. The question is whether we can find guidelines in the Scriptures or not. Types of church worship have been analysed as,

- (i) Worship in the Ancient and Orthodox Church.
- (ii) Worship in the Medieval and Romans Catholic Church.
- (iii) Traditional Worship: Lutheran and Anglican (Episcopal),
- (iv) Directed Worship: Reformed and Methodist.
- (v) Open Worship:, Baptist, Congregational, Churches of Christ, and Independent.
- (vi) Charismatic Worship: Pentecostals, Neo-Pentecostals, Quakers.¹

Contemporary Worship: Late Twentieth Century

We are aware that changes have taken place. There has been cross-fertilisation of the six general modes of worship indicated above. Open and Charismatic Worship have penetrated into the churches which used mainly liturgical worship. Perhaps there has been some traffic both ways. What, then, are we to say about these things? This mixing of worship has been somewhat divisive, whatever useful stimulation and contribution may have come from it. Some congregations resent changes to their forms of worship and have become divided because of the changes. What criteria do we use for worship, and what should be the ways of going about changes in modes? These questions are vital to us all. and it is not always easy to provide answers.

In regard to music, songs, lyrics, abbreviated choruses and the like, along with the idea of dancing and dramatic presentations, we have difficulty in making decisions. The introduction of rock music and instruments also presents a problem in deciding modes of worship. We will attempt to set forth criteria for true worship. These criteria presume this main reality, that we have been ushered by Christ our High Priest and Advocate into the

¹ See *In His Presence*, Robert N. Schaper, Fuller Seminary, 1984, pp. 6–76.

Presence of God (Heb. 10:22) and that we have been purified from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14; Rom. 12:1–2).

The Meaning of the Word ‘Worship’

An English dictionary soon shows us what we knew anyway, namely that we give honour, veneration and sometimes adoration to that which we esteem highly, seeing it as worthy of what we are doing in regard to it. Simply put, ‘worship’ (‘worth-ship’) is giving appropriate worth to any being, object or situation in which we are involved. This does not mean that our idea of ‘appropriate’ is necessarily correct or that motives for worship are pure. The fact of idolatry shows us that. To worship God is to give the honour and thanksgiving due to him, but then many do not know him. Paul said, ‘No one understands, no one seeks for God’ (Rom. 3:11), which is clearly a post-Fall statement regarding Man. It is clear from Romans 1:18–25 that Man rejected the knowledge of God, and the elements of this were

- (i) the rejection of his glory,
- (ii) refusal to give thanks,
- (iii) loss of intelligence necessary for worship, and
- (iv) exchange of the worship of God for the worship of idols.

From these 4 points (above) we can positively know what is worship.

In the O.T. the verb ‘to serve’ (*abad*) is often translated ‘to worship’ and indeed these two meanings are synonymous. The noun from the verb (*abodah*) is ‘service’ or ‘adoration’, whilst the word for ‘servant’ generally used is *ebed*, but there is the noun *abad* also. There is another verb for worship (*hishtachawah*), generally meaning ‘to bow down to’, ‘to prostrate oneself’. The Greek verb *latreuo* (‘to serve’) and the noun *latreia* (‘service’) in the LXX are used 90 and 9 times respectively, but in the N.T. 21 and 5 times respectively. The other Greek word *leitourgeo* (verb), ‘to serve’, ‘to minister’ and *leitourgia* (noun) ‘service’, ‘ministry’ are used in the LXX generally with the priestly ministry in mind, but in the N.T. both verbs and nouns are fairly interchangeable, and the sum of the matter is that ‘to worship’ and ‘to serve’ are virtually synonymous. The equivalent of *hishtachawah* is, roughly speaking, *proskuneo*, ‘to bend the knee’, ‘to pay homage’. On the whole we can sum up the words as adding up to service and worship being the one.

Whilst a word study repays the time given, the theological idea of worship is what is of practical value. In this sense we need to see the origins and nature of worship and so we need to know the contexts in which these words are used, an exercise we do not have time for in this study and not even in our limited time in this School.

The Origin of Worship

‘Origin’ is perhaps not the best word. Even so we will use it. Jesus’ great statement, ‘God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’, is clear enough. God is not seen, for he is unseen. He is not known, because he is ineffable. He is only known when he makes himself known. To worship him in spirit may well be that Man can only worship him by the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil. 3:3), but man must worship God and by his own spirit, and

he must see God as the truth, and worship him consonant with the truth, by which we mean God as he is. This is a principle which has been from the beginning.

Human worship of God, then, originates with the creation of Man. Man is one in communion with God because he is the image of God, and so worship is communion. It is that response to God of the human heart, shown as we have seen, as

- (i) a response to the glory of God,
- (ii) a giving of worth to God commensurate with his glory, and
- (iii) praise and thanksgiving for his creation of Man and his giving of
 - (a) the creational mandate of vocation (Gen. 1:28f.), and
 - (b) of gifts to him.

All of this was intelligent worship that is of the mind as well as of the affections (Rom. 12:2; cf. Deut. 10:12).

The *ways* in which worshippers respond in our church patterns of worship should make us wary of attacking what we may call ‘cultural core assumptions’. Some of us think the only way to worship is the way we do it! This is a sad mistake. The battles we have always prove to be divisive. True worship is always in unity.

Worship Following the Fall

Since worship is communion with God from a pure heart—which presupposes holy love between God and Man—then the Fall constitutes a break between God and Man. The break does not come from God’s side, but it is there. In addition to the account in Genesis 3, Romans 1:19–25 show us that Man, in rejecting God, lost the intelligence to worship, and devised surrogate objects of worship (cf. Acts 17:28–29). So follows the history of idolatry.

What we have to keep in mind is that God never ceased to provide the means of worship for Man who had disenfranchised himself. The principle of Leviticus 17:11, although stated in the covenant of Israel, is also for all in the covenant of God, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’. Here the principle of ‘I give to you that you may give to me’ is present. This is borne out by an examination of Hebrews 11:4 which speaks of Abel offering his sacrifice by faith, that is, faith in the God who makes propitiation.

This leads us to see that following the Fall, humanity divided into two groups,

- (i) the people of faith, the children of God (I John 3:10–11; Heb. 11:4ff.), and
- (ii) those whose hearts were set in rebellion and so in idolatry (cf. Rom. 1:19–25).

This means that true worship is not possible to fallen Man unless having come under the grace of God a man or a woman lives the life of faith. Idolatry must mean communion with idols (cf. I Cor. 10:14–22, ‘partners with demons’). As love, gratitude, thanksgiving and intelligent motions of worship proceed in worship of God, then idolatry is denying these to God and applying them to the surrogate god, the deities and their idols.

Knowing and Not Knowing God

Luther once said, 'to know God is to worship him', and of course to worship him is to know him, which is the reciprocal life of worship. Romans 3:11 (cf. Ps. 14:1) says no one knows God, and Romans 1:21–25 tells us that Man exchanged the glory of God for idols, exchanged the truth of God for a lie, whilst Romans 1:28 says Man 'did not see fit to acknowledge God'. Man then has shut God off from himself and himself from God. The natural man does have a belief in God and creation but his theology, cosmology and anthropology is not biblical. He knows God but he does not know him. He has an ontological pressure to worship properly but refuses this pressure, hence his inner confusion, awryness, anguish, guilt—and so on. That all have gods is without doubt. Micah 4:5, 'For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its own god'. No one is really an atheist.

God Is Always Revealing Himself

In this brief study we see that to know God is to worship him. Fallen man refuses to know God. God is ever revealing himself. He does this by various media which, in effect, are all his own word. These are the Scriptures, the prophets, dreams and visions, theophanies, angelic visitants, the law, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the apostles and the church. Man will not hear because he wills not to hear. God's action in revelation releases those who respond into true worship.

Study Two: Worship The Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

It is clear that we cannot 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' unless we first know God's holiness. By 'know' we do not simply mean the fact of its existence or even a theological grasp of its reality, but that understanding which comes to us through the word and the Spirit, by which we enter into, and experience that holiness. Normally all truth comes to us through the word, but not without the Spirit, and the Spirit is not confined within the written word, though he always acts in accordance with it—never beyond it. By this we are saying God vouchsafes revelations of his holiness, as also of his truth, righteousness, goodness and love, for these are one together.

When God said to Israel, 'Be holy for I am holy',¹ it was assumed that Israel knew God's holiness. Most cultures have an idea of 'the holy' as enshrined in their taboos. The 'holy' is the 'wholly other'. In the Scriptures God's holiness is linked with his 'otherness'—his separation from all things, and his transcendence over his creation. Even so, he is present to his creation in his holy nature, since it was created by him and he intends its purity. Often God's holiness has been described as his ethical purity. The main word for holiness, *qodesh*, appears to derive from the verb 'to cut' and so gives the idea of separation. Probably, however, it is best to look at the words—the verb 'to be holy' and the noun 'holiness'—in their contexts and this we shall do.² Often we think of God simply as peerless, transcendent and separate, but do not understand the dynamic of his holiness and that in the Scriptures it is directed at his creation, and in particular to Man whom he created.

GOD'S HOLINESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God's Active Holiness

Who is like thee, O LORD among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exod. 15:11; cf. Ps. 66:5–7).

There is none holy like the LORD, there is none besides thee; there is no rock like our God (I Sam. 2:2; cf. Deut. 32:14–16).

Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us? (I Sam. 6:20; cf. Num. 4:17–20).

¹ cf. Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1:15.

² Some of this material is taken from my book *The Splendour of Holiness* (NCPI, 1985).

Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and his power is in the skies. Terrible is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel, he gives power and strength to his people (Ps. 68:34–35; Deut. 33:26).

The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness (Amos 4:2).

The LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness (Isa. 5:16).

They will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel (Isa. 29:23).

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory³ (Isa. 6:3).

Glory as the Fire of Holiness

And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about (Ezek. 1:26–28).

For the LORD your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God (Deut. 4:25).

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire (Ps. 29:7).

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him . . . the foundations of the world were laid bare, at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils (Ps. 18:8, 15).

In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious . . . when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning (Isa. 4:2–4).

Holiness as the Glory of Majesty

robed in majesty . . . girded with strength (Ps. 93:1).

clothed with honour and majesty (Ps. 104:1).

clothed with terrible majesty (Job 37:22).

Honour and majesty are before him (I Chron. 16:27).

his glory is above earth and heaven (Ps. 148:13).

the glorious splendour of thy majesty (Ps. 145:5).

how Majestic is thy name in all the earth (Ps. 8:1).

Holiness as Elevation

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high (Isa. 33:5).

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth! (Ps. 57:11).

I cry to God Most High (Ps. 57:2; cf. 50:14; 47:2).

the Most High God . . . How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! (Dan. 4:2–3).

³ Some translations have ‘the whole earth is the fullness of his glory’.

Holiness as Fear-inducing Acts and Being

the LORD your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God (Deut. 7:21).

O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant (Neh. 1:5).

Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is he! (Ps. 99:3).

a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him (Ps. 89:7).

His Holiness Expressed in His Wrath

Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways; and I will punish you for all your abominations. And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD, who smite (Ezek. 7:8–9).

God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day (Ps. 7:11).

For all our days pass away under thy wrath . . . Who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee? (Ps. 90:9, 11).

God's Holiness is Redemptive

Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you, says the Lord; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 41:14).

For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life (Isa. 43:3–4).

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called (Isa. 54:5).

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go' (Isa. 48:17).

Conclusion as to God's Holiness in the Old Testament

The seven headings above give us just a glimpse of the holiness of God. We need to see God more fully in creation, in covenant, in redemption, in judgment, in love and in worship. His holiness is to do with all these things, as indeed it is to do with them in the New Testament.

GOD'S HOLINESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are many promises in the Old Testament of the holiness which was to come to God's people in relation to the New Covenant (cf. Ezek. 36:24–28; 37:23; Isa. 4:2–6; Jer. 31:31–34; 33:11). Paul says this plan for our holiness was laid before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3ff.), a claim which Peter reiterates (I Pet. 1:2). That which was to be born of Mary was to be called 'holy, the Son of God' (Luke 1:35; cf. Acts 3:14; 4:36). Jesus was 'the holy one of God', and came to purify his people as he did those caught in the power of unclean demons, and in the grip of their guilt.

'To save his people from their sins' was to purify them and bring them to holiness, the blood of Christ 'cleansing their consciences from dead works to serve [worship] the living

God'. The saving work of the Cross also brought them sanctification as Romans chapters 6—8 (cf. Col. 3:1ff.) so clearly set out.

As we have many instances in the Old Testament where judgment came on those who would profane God in the eyes of people, so we have cases also in the New Testament, the case of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, and the innumerable examples in the Book of the Revelation, a matter we discussed in a previous study. What we are about is

- (i) that we should be holy in order to worship in a holy manner, and
- (ii) what it means to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'.

WORSHIPPING THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS⁴

Before we return to the Old Testament texts dealing with such worship we must recognise that in the New Testament, worship plays a most significant role.⁵ Even so, it is the Book of the Revelation which brings us to that rich worship which the holiness of God demands. It is the Father who has anticipated such worship by sending the Son and through him, bringing us to that holiness by which alone we even dare worship him, and by which we cannot but worship him.

The injunction, 'Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness', is found in the AV in I Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 29:2 and 96:9. In later translations (e.g. RSV) it is translated 'worship the LORD in holy array', or (NRSV) 'worship the LORD in holy splendour'. The NEB has 'Bow down to the Lord in the splendour of holiness'. The first question is, 'Who is to bow down?' and the second is, 'What is the beauty of holiness?' or, 'What is the holy array demanded?'

In I Chronicles 16:29 it is 'all the earth' and 'families of peoples' who are to so worship. In Psalm 29:1–2 it is 'heavenly beings' or 'sons of gods' who are thrice exhorted to worship in an appropriate manner. In Psalm 96:9 it is 'families of the peoples'.

'The beauty of holiness' is debated. Is it within the beauty of God's holiness—God's beauty *is* his holiness—that worship is to be given, or is 'holy array' *the way* in which the worshippers are to worship? It seems best to conflate these two ideas and paraphrase the matter as follows, 'God's beauty which is holiness demands worship which is commensurate with it, so all who now worship must do so in the manner prescribed and fitting for this occasion, and this they can do only when they are *in* his holiness'.

This would mean angels must worship in fitting array, and this could mean that the vast hierarchy of celestial creatures should worship in their true array. This form of array we see in the Book of the Revelation where, commencing with celestials, living creatures and then the twenty-four elders, were often joined by myriads of angels, then the redeemed of humanity, and finally every living creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth. A minor description of this we find in Hebrews 12:22–24. Whilst God and the Lamb do not as such join in the worship, they are 'the beauty of holiness' in their own being and as such inspire and order 'the holy array', and in fact give it its form and completeness. To imagine such worship is beyond the mind's ability: to sense it is to enrapture the human spirit.

⁴ At the time of preparing this study I had not been able to use John Kleinig's book *The Lord's Song*, subtitled 'The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles' (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, ISOT Pr., 1993).

⁵ See Appendix, 'New Testament Worship'.

THE HOLY ARRAY IN THE TEMPLE

Some commentators take ‘the beauty of holiness’ to mean ‘the adornment of holiness’ and this point interests us. It is clear that in the temple all who led the worship were attired in dress that was prescribed. Priests and Levites dared not go outside those prescriptions. Likewise the ‘array’ or ‘hierarchy’ of them was prescribed. Even so, they were the leaders and not the entire congregation, so in many psalms and songs they called on the congregation to worship with them, this sometimes being done by repetitive singing which followed a cantor’s leading. Instruments were also prescribed. In I Chronicles 16:4–7 we have a picture of prescriptions:

Moreover he appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechari’ah, Je-i’el, Shemi’ramoth, Jehi’el, Mattithi’ah, Eli’ab, Benai’ah, O’bed-e’dom, and Je-i’el, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benai’ah and Jaha’ziel the priests were to blow trumpets continually, before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brethren.

Again, in II Chronicles 5:11–14 we see prescribed worship and its outcome:

Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions; and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jedu’tun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with a hundred and twenty priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever,’ the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

In I Chronicles 25:1–3 it is shown that appointed musicians ‘should prophesy with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals’.

CONCLUSION: WORSHIPPING THE LORD IN HOLY ARRAY IS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD, ALWAYS

God does not change in his holiness. In the New Testament the people of God are commanded to be holy even as God is holy, and without that holiness they will never see the Lord. The pure in heart will see him. The gospel is not simply to save men and women, but to make them holy. The fruit of the gospel is holiness (Rom. 6:22). Indeed, it is the transforming power of God which causes them to worship him in love and holiness, and to order their lives so that they serve him in every detail. Worship is not to be of disorder and confusion, but of order (I Cor. 14:32). The Triune worship which we now know is of such high order as to demand that it be commensurate with God’s ‘beauty of holiness’, and of such order that it is in ‘holy array’.

This conclusion should cause us to pause and study the way in which we worship. This has to do with the order, content and congregational participation. All elements unworthy of true worship must be eliminated, since we must worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, in that holy array granted by the Spirit of God.

Study Three: The Forms of Praise

INTRODUCTION: A SURVEY OF SCRIPTURAL PRAISE

We need to examine both the Old and New Testaments and see what were the forms of praise which operated in the people of God. I believe there are many elements in praise which we list below, such as singing, musical instruments, and dancing which are set out in order which would be most helpful to us. For example, we find that most worship is prescribed. That is, worshipper may not do just what they will: they must follow prescriptions. For example we have today what we call contemporary worship', meaning generally, that we launch out on what we feel is lively worship, singing in our modern idiom, and making the prayers and Scripture readings 'relevant' to our present way of life. Often we base our changes on the idea that 'Old is out: new is good,' which may or may not be true. Contemporary worship may just be a revolt against what we think is 'the establishment', when that may not be the case. Few who do this have studied the great wealth of worship which can be found in the Old and New Testaments, and down through our Christian history. We may oppose prescriptions as though they will inhibit a freedom we can know in worship. If we go back the Psalms we find that often instructions are given at the head of the Psalm. In all music prescriptions are given, for the authors know how they want their music played and sung. The following are some examples of prescription.

(i) In I Chronicles 16:4–7 we have a picture of prescriptions:

Moreover he appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechari'ah, Je-i'el, Shemi'ramoth, Jehi'el, Mattithi'ah, Eli'ab, Benai'ah, O'bed-e'dom, and Je-i'el, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benai'ah and Jaha'ziel the priests were to blow trumpets continually, before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the Lord by Asaph and his brethren.

(ii) In II Chronicles 5:11–14 we see prescribed worship and its outcome:

Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions; and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jedu'thun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with a hundred and twenty priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever,' the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

THE FORMS OF PRAISE

(i) Singing

Singing is quite a practice within the times of the Bible. If we limit our enquiry to praise-music then that will eliminate other elements of singing. We will seek primarily to see its relationship to the praise of God. Whilst Tubal Cain is mentioned as the inventor of musical instruments, and these must have gone along with singing, yet it is not until the time of Jacob that we hear, explicitly, of singing, when Laban complains to Jacob, “Why did you flee secretly and cheat me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre”. This then has been called “a farewell song”, and was perhaps part of a regular ritual. In Numbers 21:17 there is a song to a well which seems to be part of a simple custom. Job 21:12 speaks of singing as a part of life. It seems that singing, especially in \therefore praise can be roughly divided into two areas, (a) Where songs have spontaneously happened or been composed in regard to a special event of blessing, and (b) Where songs have been structured, or even spontaneously composed, but are now used with regularity, as part of a liturgy or ritual of worship.

(a) Spontaneous Songs

The Song of Moses, which was sung by Moses and all the people was certainly spontaneous song. Miriam and her women took the first stanza and made it into a refrain which was doubtless sung with repetition. It is filled with praise:

“Who is like Thee, O Lord, among the gods?

Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness?

Terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

Thou has led in Thy steadfast love

the people whom Thou hast redeemed.”

This song became famous and traditional amongst the people of God. Psalm 106:12 says of it, “They believed His words, they sang His praises”, and says this was when “He saved them from the hand of the foe, and delivered them from the power of the enemy, and the waters covered the adversaries; not one of them was left.” Later, as we see in Revelation this song becomes one with the Song of the Lamb.

In Judges 5 there is *the song of Deborah and Barak*. It is really an epic song, and not directly praise to God, although implicitly it refers the victory to God, and its first stanza includes the cry, “Bless the Lord!” Whilst the song may be spontaneous it is a careful account of the victory wrought through these two.

In I Samuel 18:6-7 there is a spontaneous song when *Saul and David* return from the slaughter of the Philistines. It was usual to meet a loved or famous one with “singing and dancing and timbrels and songs of joy” (cf. Judges 11:34), and so they met Saul and David

The Forms of Praise

singing,

“Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.”

We can imagine how this grew into an excited throbbing refrain, much to Saul's anger and (probably) David's delight.

David, of course, was a man of song, and in fact was called “The sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1). In II Sam. 22:2f. David sings one of his songs. The occasion of the song was when the Lord delivered him from the hands of his enemies, and in particular from Saul. It is a song of praise to God, as also it sings of his deliverance by God. In the next chapter there is another song by David which is called “The last words of David, the son of Jesse”.¹

However David composed more songs and psalms than we can number. We are not sure of the number of Psalms which are his, **but certainly** the many praise Psalms testify to a man who knew God intimately and had had many experiences of His nature in creation, grace and providence.

The Song of Hannah is famous for its very strong praise of God, and revelation of His nature. In many ways the later “Magnificat” of Mary resembles this powerful song of an unusual woman. This, too, we take to be spontaneous, although she must have pondered deeply the matter of Samuel's conception, birth and life. As always these deep songs come from a rich experience. *Hezekiah's song to God* (Isaiah 38:10ff.) also came out of a deep experience. We are reminded of Jonah's similar experience when he went down into the depths of the sea (Jonah ch.2). Hezekiah says, “Death cannot praise Thee!” and Jonah, after coming out of such depths cries, “I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to Thee; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!”

When we come to the *New Testament* there are many songs. If we take *the prophecy of Zechariah* over his son John, *Mary in her song* which magnifies the Lord, *Simeon 2n his utterance* concerning the fulfilment of the prophecies, and even *Anna* as she gives thanks to God for “the redemption of Israel”, then we have songs which issue from the new thing that is happening.

For the rest we have portions of songs which must have initially been uttered by someone, perhaps even the writers of the letter in which they are embedded. One such is Philippians 2:5-11. In I Timothy 3:16 is another gem:

“He was manifested in the flesh
Vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, Preached among the nations,
Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.”

Again in II Timothy 2:11:

¹ See also David's lament over Saul and Jonathon (II Sam. 18:27). This was a dirge or KINAH (Heb.) as was in fact Jeremiah's "Lamentation", a deeply moved song of sorrow over Jerusalem.

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“If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;

If we endure, we shall also reign with him;

If we deny him, he shall also deny us:

If we are faithless, he remains faithful -

For he cannot deny himself.”

Finally we remember that the songs in heaven shared by celestial creatures, and often too the redeemed from amongst men, have their songs which are involuntary because they express, beautifully, the truth as it is felt and recognised. These are special songs of praise to God.

(b) Ordered Songs and Singing

We have already indicated there were occasions when singing was the order for the time or situation. Laban expected Jacob to remain for a family farewell with its customary song. Jephthah's daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and dances, doubtless singing to them. Jeremiah 31:4 speaks of the customary nature of this event:

“O virgin Israel!

Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels,

And shall go forth in the dance of
the merry-makers.”

In I Chronicles 15:16-25 we read of David's arrangement to raise choirs from the Levites. He “commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brethren as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals *to raise sounds of joy.*” In this section details are given as to who are to play the various instruments. It seems that the whole of the choristers and players were divided into 24 classes and are said to have been 4,000 in number, with 288 leaders. In II Chron. 5:12ff. we read that

“all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with a hundred and twenty priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,

“For He is good, for His steadfast love
endures for ever,’

the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”

This is a most incredible and beautiful occasion, in which the unison of the players and singers was the prelude to the glory of the Lord filling the house. Yet even though this was a special occasion, the worship of Israel was with music, choirs and singing. The Psalms constitute a whole study in themselves. It is a complex study, namely because the mode of music which they used has long been lost. There is much conjecture, and much reconstruction of what happened in the past, but even the instruments which have been discovered are not of

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great use, since they require understanding which is not available to us.²

The Psalms³ must be studied carefully. The heading-introductions to each; where present are revealing. They often tell the occasion on which the song was created and so give the key to the Psalm. Sometimes musical directions are given, even to the tune to be used, and it is supposed some tunes were “secular” e.g. Psalm 45 to the tune of “The Lilies”, possibly a pop-song of the day! It would seem then that all of these songs were once spontaneous or involuntary, but became a part of the worship pattern of Israel. Of course there was a time when there were no psalms, and very few songs, but as time went on this treasury was greatly used for all sorts of occasions, confession, teaching, mourning, and the like. When it comes to the matter of praise, then they are, of course, primary. Being originally songs of praise by a person, they became the means of praise by the whole congregation, down through the generations. They approximate to the ordered hymns of the Christian era.

In the *New Testament* there may well have been these ordered songs and Psalms. If we read Col. 3:16-17, Ephes. 5:18-20 with I Cor. 14:26f. then we can see that both ordered songs and spontaneous songs are used. The nature of these songs is to be noted. In Col. 3:16 apparently they teach and admonish by **their content** and mode of being used. In Ephes. 5:19 it speaks of “*addressing one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”, and then adds, “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”, i.e. singing is addressed in two directions -horizontally and vertically. I Cor. 14:26 gives the impression that the contribution of a psalm or song is every bit as important as any other contribution. Also in I Cor. chs. 12-14 there is an exercise called “singing in (or, with) the Spirit”. Various interpretations are put on this, but at least it must mean that one sings by the aid of the Spirit, and that what one sings is given by the Spirit. It would appear to be a high order of worship.

Whilst to date we have been fairly matter-of-fact about our descriptions of Song we should also see the subjective side of psalms and hymns and songs. They must arise out of a deep level of understanding, affections and will. When addressed to God they must constitute the richest expression of human adoration. Also whilst the creation of each song is within the situation and nature of a person, yet the corporate and congregational expression of the same adoration adds immeasurably to its initial origin and value. It is interesting to speculate, for example, on the statement by someone that “David's harp was more powerful than his sword”. Without expanding on the nature of singing and music we know that it has had an enormous affect upon mankind, and has effected many wonderful results. As a medium of praise it is, perhaps, unsurpassed.

(ii) MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Not all songs are sung to instruments, nor are instruments always used with vocal accompaniment. The music and musical instruments of the Bible constitute, as we have said, a study on their own. It is the fact of music itself which is our interest. We have seen the use of music with instruments in the Song of Moses, and especially as Miriam and her women danced and sang with her. We have seen reference to Jephthah's daughter meeting him with

² For a full treatment of the music as such see the articles on “music” in “*The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*”, Vol. 3, pp.457-476 and “*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*” Vol. 3, pp. 456-463.

³ For a detailed study of the psalms see “*The New Dictionary of the Bible*” (I.V.F.), article “Psalms, Book of” pp. 1053-1059.

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minstrels. Also we read of it in many other passages such as Jehoshaphat's return to Jerusalem after his victory (II Chron. 20:28) when "They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets to the house of the Lord". We saw David's arrangements for the choirs of priests and Levites with their musical instruments. Such were used in the vintage festivals (Isa. 16:10, and also at feasts (cf. Isa. 5:12, Amos 6:5). Kings had players and singers (II Sam. 19:35, Eccles. 2:8). A shepherd boy had his lyre (I Sam. 16:18), and in fact music and singing played so large a part in Israel's life that they were renowned for their singing. It was so characteristic of them that they were asked to "sing the songs of Zion in a strange land", but could not (Psalm 137:1-3).

Within the Psalms themselves there are many urgings to use the instruments in praise to God. The last Psalm (150) urges that every instrument be used, and is, incidentally, a good lead on the names and number of instruments used. Perhaps the first of all music in the worship of God was that of the *bells* on the garment of the high-priest. In Exodus 28:31-35 instructions are given for this. Some have seen the bells related to "lest he die (verse 35)" meaning that they were a protection from evil powers. Whatever their meaning they had a real use, and of course kept telling the people outside that the priest was in continuing intercession for them. *Trumpets* also were connected with worship. In Numbers 10:1-10 instructions are given for the making and use of trumpets. Israel, being a theocracy did not know a division between the sacred and the secular (so called). Hence the trumpets were used to break camp, or for warning, but also for blowing over "your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings: they serve you for a remembrance before your God ..."

Trumpets were blown for a day of solemn rest on the first day of the seventh month. On the tenth day was the day of atonement. In the Jubilee year the trumpets were to be blown through the land to proclaim freedom to debtors, prisoners and slaves (Exodus 23 and 25). The trumpets then were associated with worship, sacrifice and liberation.

The remaining instruments were used, as we have seen from I Chron. 15:16-28 and II Chron. 5:12-14, in the worship of the temple as the Levites and priests played them with their singing. In the dedication of the temple there was a fanfare of one hundred and twenty trumpets! That must have been magnificent. Some of the instruments mentioned are as follows:

(a) Wind Instruments

The pipe. There is some debate as to what it was, but general opinion favours it being the *oboe*. It was used in festival processions (Isaiah 30:29), at times of national rejoicing (I King 1:40), and also for mourning at funerals (Matt. 9:23). In Jeremiah 48:36 the heart is said to moan like its sound. *The Flute.* It is spoken of only in Daniel, and in fact often the pipe is called the flute although they were different instruments. *The Organ.* It is mentioned in Gen. 4:21, Job 30:31, 21:12 and Psalm 150:4. It is thought to have been some form of pipe, or multiple pipes. *The Horn.* It was formed from a word used for containing oil, and was the horn of an animal or in that shape. It was the instrument used in the siege of Jericho, and at the blowing of these instruments the walls fell. It is also listed in I Chron. 25:5. *The Trumpet.* There are two terms used for trumpet, one being the horn referred to above and which was used to summon the people to worship or to war. The other trumpet was the one we have referred to under (ii) above. *The Cornet.* It is another word for horn or trumpet, referred to above.

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(b) Stringed Instruments

The Harp. It is the first musical instrument referred to in the Bible (Gen. 4:21). It is again mentioned in Gen. 31:27 in connection with Laban and Jacob. In I Sam. 10:5 it is used by prophets along with other instruments. David played it with his hand (I Sam. 16:23), but it is thought a plectrum was also used. There are many of these instruments with variations as to make and size, some being cheap, others very expensive. In many translations it is called the lyre, although often the two are spoken of in the one breath (e.g. II Sam. 6:5). They must have represented variations one of the other. *The Psaltery.* First mentioned in I Sam. 10:5 its name relates to the Greek psallo, i.e. "to pluck" and is thought to have been the instrument which supplied the bass. Some think it had a resonant bulge at the bottom which produced a deep sound, but we cannot be sure. *The Trigon or 'saekbutt'.* The latter word is used in the AN., the former in the R.S.V. It is thought to be a sevenstringed instrument, whilst others think it may have been even a wind instrument. It is only mentioned in Daniel and was not used in Israel.

(c) Percussion Instruments

Timbrel and Tabret. These are both mentioned (8 times each in the O.T.). Miriam used the timbrel in her rejoicing (Exodus 15) and it appears the tabret was peculiarly a women's instrument. It was not used in the temple. Its use was always for times of merriment, and joy (II Sam. 6:5, I Chron. 13:8, Psalms 68:25). *Cymbals.* These are mentioned many times in the O.T. They are called for in Psalm 150. *Bells.* We have already dealt with these above, as they were used on the robe of the high priest. There is an unusual reference to bells in Zech. 14:20, "And on that day (the Day of the Lord) there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the Lord'". This seems to mean that even the "secular will become 'Holy to the Lord', and so that music must be sacred.

We may conclude then that musical instruments, although used for sad and funeral occasions were primarily used for times of joy, on national, worship, and festival occasions. They combined together to be a rich medium of praise to God.

(iii) Dancing

As we have repeatedly said, dancing was usually involved in music and the use of musical instruments, and these both often with singing, and all often, in the praise of God. So far as scholars can trace, dancing was not exercised purely as an art. Nor for that matter was music or singing. There was dancing attached to idolatry, as in the golden-calf story (Exodus 32:19), and at Carmel (I Kings 18:26) as the devotees called on the name of Baal. This too indicates that dancing was primarily religious, even if the religion was false.

In Israel singing and dancing combined were signs of joy, even without worship connotation. We saw the women coming to meet Saul and David after their victory "singing and dancing ... with timbrels, with songs of joy and with instruments of music." Jephthah's daughter had come in the same way to meet her father, with delight. This scene is quite touching, signifying her deep devotion, since dancing is a relaxed and joyous movement.

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As for worship, the dancing of Miriam and her women, with their timbrels, was in praise to God. Likewise David's dance before the ark was worship. He was dressed as a priest, with an ephod, and his movements were whirling, whilst the dance itself was of a long duration. This was intended as pure worship. In II Sam. 6:16 it is described as leaping and dancing, and so far was it from David's usual composure that Michal, David's wife and daughter of Saul, was contemptuous of him. His statement was, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father, and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord - and *I will make merry before the Lord.*" This proves that his dance was both thanksgiving and praise. Hence verse 5 of the same chapter says, "David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines, and castanets and cymbals."

This agrees with Psalm 149:1-4:

"Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the faithful!

Let Israel be glad in his Maker,
Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King!
Let them praise His name with dancing!

Making melody to Him with timbrel and lyre!

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people, He adorns the humble with victory."

Likewise in Psalm 150 which is a praise psalm it is commanded:

"Praise Him with trumpet sound;

Praise Him with lute and harp!

Praise Him with timbrel and dance!

Also we are to understand that dancing accompanied the festivals, for they were religious in origin. In Judges 21:19 the yearly feast to the Lord within the vineyard was accompanied by the dancing of young women. Post-Biblical history shows the Jews as dancing on the Day of Atonement and during the Feast of Tabernacles, and this could mean that they had actually danced on those feasts. Without doubt the life of Israel, in regard to worship, was one of joy, and even of revelling.

In Jeremiah 31:4 God promises the restoration of Israel and that they will again go forth with musical instruments singing and dancing, "in the dance of the merry-makers". In Psalm 30:11 David cries,

'Thou has turned my mourning into dancing for me,
Thou hast loosed my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness,
That my soul may praise thee, and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thee thanks to Thee for ever."

We may conclude then, in this matter of the modes of praise, that worshippers had the opportunity to express themselves, and their praise and adoration of God in singing, music and dancing.