

## **"Praise And Music In The Scriptures"**

### ***Introduction***

Few would debate the fact that praise, worship, music, singing and dancing as they are seen in the Scriptures all go together to form worship<sup>1</sup> acceptable to God. Within the scope of this study we hope to cover some of these aspects, but the material is too profuse to deal with it adequately. Hence we will try to reduce the material on praise to minimal principles and descriptions of its use, whilst with music, singing, dancing and the use of instruments we will note the occasions and modes and refer the student to sources which deal with these more adequately. Roughly speaking our study divides into two fairly natural sections, the first being on praise and the second on music, singing and dancing. The third section will be our conclusion on the whole matter of praise.

## **SECTION ONE: PRAISE IN THE SCRIPTURES**

### ***1. What Is Praise?***

Praise can be said to be recognition and acknowledgement of the worth of another. It may be of God, a creature, a person, a thing, or a situation. In fact it can be of anything. It involves two parties, although one of these may be a thing or situation. Praise may be within the one praising, yet unexpressed, but it becomes fully praise when it is expressed. Praise is dynamic as it is generally pleasing to the one or ones who receive it, unless there is on their part an unhealthy approach to praise. That praise is dynamic is testified to by the presence of flattery. Flattery is false praise, and is dangerous. It beguiles the flattered one into a false view of himself, and places him within a harmful relationship. On the other hand, accusation and criticism can also be false, and if so are the opposite of praise. Their destructive powers testify to the edifying powers of true praise.

There are those who object to praise. Probably such an objection cannot be sustained. This praise may have been mistaken for flattery. It may be that those who object feel that the one praised will not be helped, but lifted to pride which itself would be damaging. This is certainly a consideration. However, the criticism may be subjective on the part of the spectator. He may either covet that praise for himself or assume the one praised will find it harmful, for this would be precisely the effect in his own case.

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<sup>1</sup> Material which relates to the study is that on worship (LFS. No. 12), prayer (LFS. No. 13), and thanksgiving (LFS. No. 3). The use of these will help to fill out the study, and save duplicating the material within this paper.

There is a further objection to praise. Some even criticise God's demand for praise as selfish, conceited and egotistical. Commonsense says that God can be none of these. Again the objector probably has his own emotional problem related to praise, either of jealousy or some inability to cope with praise when it comes to him. The objection shows ignorance of the true nature of praise. True praise is generally the ungrudging and even spontaneous utterance of one who is excited with the beauty, character and worth of the object of his praise. This is how it is in Scripture. However, probably the richest thing about praise is that the one giving it has accepted the object of his praise, and in some sense has related to him or it. This is certainly the case with one who praises God. C.S. Lewis ("Reflections on the Psalms" 1958, p.95) says, "Therefore praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment: it is its appointed consummation ... In inviting us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him".

## ***2. The Power of Praise***

The real truth of praise is that the one praising has appraised the object of his praise. That is he has seen its worth. Another way of saying this is that he has seen it as it truly is, insofar as he is capable, and so has come to discover its true nature. This places him that much further in understanding of the true order of things. Hence knowing this truth he is much freer in himself.

When a man praises God, giving Him His true worth, then he is really accepting God as He is, and fellowshiping with Him. When he sees the true worth and nature of God he comes to see the true nature and worth of himself) since he is made in the image of God. This is borne out in Romans 1:18-32. When man did not praise God, i.e. in giving Him His glory, (honour, worth), and failed to be thankful (for this worth), then he immediately demeaned himself. In fact he can be said to have dehumanised himself. To give worth to God is to come into one's own true worth. This is not selfish, since selfishness is always related to going beyond one's true worth, one's authentic self. God is in no sense selfish in desiring recognition of His own true worth. As in human affairs the denial of true worth is wrong, so with God the confession of His true worth is acceptable praise and reasonable worship.

## ***3. The Problem of Praise***

Man only has a problem with praise because, in Adam, he denied the true worth of God. The source of that temptation to which he acceded was Satan. Satan himself was jealous of God, and inordinately proud of his own beauty and powers (cf. Isaiah 14:12f., Ezekiel ch. 28). Revelation 12 describes his rebellion against God. From that point he has denied the true worth of God as Creator, Redeemer, and as the One who renews His entire creation.

Man has to accrue praise to himself in self-justifying attempts to escape his guilt and the accusation of his failure. In having fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), he cannot now afford to give glory to anything but himself and his own things. Thus when he glorifies it is either in spite of himself, or for the ploy of gaining something.

If we face this problem of praise honestly, then we can see that even redeemed man will be under great temptation to limit his praise of God and His universe, and promote his own praise. He will always have to battle against

self-justification, otherwise he would be uneasy and unfulfilled. As we have said, the giving of praise in accordance with the truth greatly edifies the one praising, even though self-edification is not his conscious motive.

#### ***4. The True Principle of Praise***

Psalm 50:23 has it, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me". The R.S.V. has, "He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honours me". Let us see that thanksgiving and praise are closely related, and indeed almost the same thing. Worship is also closely related to these two, and prayer is often intimately linked with the three. Certainly when praise is directed to God, then it is part of worship and prayer.

Praise, then, is the glorification of God. Now to glorify God is not to expand the glory which is His, or to heighten it so that it is beyond what it is. It is simply, though gladly, to acknowledge Him as He is! This takes us back to our point, that to praise or glorify God is to come to know Him as He is, be glad of it and express it as such. We then have satisfaction as we truly come to see ourselves. It goes without saying that the only sight of ourselves which is tolerable is when we see ourselves in and under the grace of God!

In all of this there must be the recognition that the universe flows from God. He is its source. All things are dependent upon Him. Yet we must see that the nature of their contingency is not frustrating. In fact to be contingent is the blissful norm. It is to be what one truly is. We will see that all His works praise Him, and only the rebellious elements refuse this praise. This refusal is perversion of true creational being. Hence not to praise becomes a source of self-perversion, and ultimately, of self-destruction.

#### ***5. The Praise of God***

##### **(i) Who and What Praises God?**

Psalm 145:10 says, "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee!" This means that everything praises God. Hence Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork". Psalm 103:22 (with other places) invokes, "Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion", and adds "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" In Psalm 150 the psalmist concludes with "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!" He adds, "Praise the Lord!" All things, there fore, should praise God.

Psalm 89:5ff. is a titanic description of the greatness of God. The psalmist calls upon the heavens, "Let the heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, thy faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones, for who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him?" In this the heavens praise God, and this of course includes the heavenly beings. Doubtless, then, from the highest order, descending to the lowest all His works praise Him. The Revelation and other passages of Scripture show the living creatures (e.g. Rev. 4:7-11), the seraphim (Isaiah 6), and the whole angelic hosts (Rev. 5:11-14) as praising God. In Psalm 103:20-21 there is an invocation to the angels, the holy ones and the hosts of God to praise Him.

Man, too, must praise God. If all His works praise Him then man no less must praise. Romans 8:18ff. shows the frustration of creation, which because of man's sin, is under the frustration of futility. It praises, but cannot express its praise fully. Likewise fallen man does not praise God, but then not to praise is to be dysfunctional and deficient as a creature, and so, sinful as a person. Proverbs 27:21 says "a man is judged by his praise". Doubtless in its context it means whether he does this sincerely or is a flatterer. Nevertheless the principle stands; man is what he is, and this is indicated primarily by his praise or the lack of it. It may well be that man, beyond even the angelic creatures, is most able to praise, for he most of all has affinity with God.

Various differentiations exist amongst man. Sinners do not praise God, but rather have a dread, or, perversely a contempt of God. They will not praise. Those who are redeemed praise the Lord (Psalm 107:1-3), whilst Psalm 103:1-5 represents a redeemed person who is praising God "with all that is in me". I Peter 2:9-10 speaks of the redeemed telling the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. However for the moment let us not dwell on why they praise, so much as on who praises Him. In Psalm 113:1 it is the servants of the Lord who praise Him. In Psalm 145:10 it is "thy saints", and in Psalm 135:19-20 it is the people of Israel, and in particular the priest and the Levites. In Psalm 149:2 it is the worshippers in the temple, and in Psalm 140:13 the righteous, and in Psalm 100 it is "all ye lands:, i.e. "all the peoples". In fact this is one of the grandest of all Biblical themes, all the nations being brought to the feet of God. Philippians 2:9-11 (cf. I Cor. 15:24-28) shows the ultimate praise of all things. Only in willing submission is praise truly expressed.

We can conclude then that there is nothing in all creation which is not expected to praise God. This does not mean that all do now praise the Lord, but by a curious fact of creation and redemption even the wrath of man, his evil and his opposition are, and will turn out to be, to the praise of God. Psalm 76:10 says "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee". Hence in Romans 9:17 it is written, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth'". A comparison of the incident in Exodus 9:13 will underline this. Man's perversion only serves to show many of the attributes of God such as mercy, holiness and justice.

## **(ii) For What is God Praised?**

It would be impossible to marshal all the things for which God is praised. Probably they are all summed up in the simple statement.

"Praise the Lord!  
O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,  
for His steadfast love endures for ever!"

This beautiful statement is often met in the O.T. (e.g. Psalm 106:1, 107:1, 118:1). Primarily we praise God because He is good. This may sound simple, and even dull, but rightly understood it is of greatest importance. Far from being dull it is wonderfully alive. If God is not good then the universe cannot be good. Nothing can succeed in the way of goodness. The whole creation is faced with the tragedy of absurdity or evil, or purposelessness. Goodness is not mere moralism. It embodies the great integrity of God Who controls His creation for its appointed good, and its ultimate right goals.

This goodness embraces all the nature of God, and even the fact that He is love. Hence what we call His attributes are all contained within, and are part of, His whole nature. Thus when praise is given it is given because of these elements, and the one praising will single out an attribute or praise God in His entirety. Roughly speaking, these praises will relate to (a) God as Creator, and the creation He has produced, (b) God and His salvation which He has shown to sinful man, and by which He will release the very creation which is temporarily under the bondage of corruption. (C) God and the final goal He has set for His creation, namely the glorification of His universe.

### **(a) Creation**

Primarily praise is offered to God simply for the fact that He is. Yet it is what He is that causes this praise. What He is, is primarily known by the creation in the fact of its being called into being. Creation is glad to be, to exist, to live. Many philosophers have tried to show that the existence of creation, and in particular of man, is either pointless or absurd. Nihilism denies purpose and meaning, whilst existentialism simply demands the experience of the moment without giving it an ultimate rationale. The praises depicted in Scripture are of the joyful acceptance of being in the midst of a total creation. This is not to say that creatures and men do not have their problems with the conflicts which exist in creation. Often they do have such problems. Some of these may exist because of sinfulness, or rebellion against the creational order. Even so the rebellious still wish to exist and be part of the creation. However much they may demean it, they wish to live in it.

The simplest cry for praise for creation is Psalm 100:3-4, "Know that the Lord is God!" There could be nothing more simple, nothing more profound. "It is He that has made us, and we are His". Again, simple and profound. Then the call, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His Courts with praise". In Rev. 4:11 the living creatures and the elders cry "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou didst create all things, and by Thy will they existed and were created". Psalm 148 calls upon the various elements of creation to praise God. The psalmist says, "Let them praise the Lord! For He commanded and they were created." We have already seen that in fact "all thy works praise thee", and that the order of creation is set forth and highly extolled in a psalm such as Psalm 104. Having seen this order of harmony and function the psalmist concludes,

"I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being."

We conclude, then, that the fact of creation is a great cause for praise.

### **(b) Government**

The government of the world is a cause for praise. If it is not well governed then it is a cause for concern. It is only good as creation when it is rightly governed. Its government first concerns the order and harmony of the entire creation, and secondly the order and government of the nations. For Israel there is special cause for praise when God governs the nations with a view to the well-being of Israel, and even Israel's primacy amongst the nations as the people of God.

Psalms 113-118 and 136 are called the "Hallel" or praise Psalms. "Hallelujah" is really "Praise Yahweh!" In Psalm 113:4 it is stated, as the cause for praise, "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the

heavens!" It then goes on to describe the practical manner in which God works out His government, in relation to the poor and even the barren woman. Psalm 97 opens with "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice!", i.e. "God is in control, the earth may then be glad!" In Psalm 99 He is not only governing the earth, but He is "great in Zion: He is exalted over all the peoples". Israel is secure because God governs all the earth. This theme is developed greatly in the Psalms 105-108, where the great deeds of God in His government with Israel are extolled. By His deeds He controlled Israel, and for that matter the nations surrounding or opposed to her.

On a wider scale, that of theodicy, we have the praises of those who understand God working in history. Revelation 15:1-4 depicts the conquerors of the Beast, and other celestial creatures singing the Song of Moses, and of the Lamb. They cry,

"Great and wonderful are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty!  
 Just and true are thy ways, O King of the Ages!  
 Who shall not fear and glorify, Thy name, O Lord?  
 For Thou alone art holy.  
 All nations shall come and worship Thee,  
 For Thy judgements have been revealed.

In Revelation 16:4-7 there is another praise ascription for what God has done. In Revelation 19:1-5 there is praise and rejoicing for the government of God in the defeat of Babylon. In fact the closing chapters of the Revelation, in their vindication of the righteousness of God, are the cause of firm and wholesome praise.

### **(c) Providence**

This is really part of the wider scheme of government. Taken at random we can find praise for the Lord who remembers the poor (Psa. 100,41), the sick (Psa. 41, 103), the hungry (Psa. 104:27-28), the weak (Psa. 103:13ff.). However the idea of providence is much wider. It includes God's care for all His creatures (Psalm 104), and His constant occupation with His creation, providing for it, and nurturing it. In fact this provides the major portion of praise, for finally providence must include salvation, the redemption of man from evil forces, and the restoration of man to his true dignity.

### **(d) Salvation**

This embraces a wide theme because sickness, the oppression of evil men and powers, as well as the weight and anguish of sin are forces which man cannot defeat in his own powers. Psalm 40 is the song of a deliverance David has known. He says, "I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation". In Psalm 103 the psalmist is filled with intense praise for the Lord who "forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases". Sin and sickness are so often linked in both the O.T. and the N.T.

There is also national deliverance. This is the theme of many praise songs such as that of Moses, of Miriam and the women (Exodus 15), of Deborah in Judges (5), and Hezekiah in Isaiah (38:10ff.). In the case of Hezekiah it was both national and personal.

The salvation which really evokes the praises of His people is that of personal salvation, both in the O.T. and the N.T. The same principle seen in Psalm 103, of rejoicing because of deliverance from sin and sickness, is seen

in the Gospels when Jesus heals the sick, liberates the demon-possessed and brings peace to the sinful, through forgiveness<sup>2</sup>. In some cases the minds of the common people are open and they spontaneously praise God. In other cases the critics are many, but even here against the natural predilections they give spontaneous praise to God (cf. Luke 5:17-26). The epistles are also alive with praise for what God has done in Christ. Often the writers burst into ascriptions to God which flow out of a full heart (e.g. Romans 11:33-36, II Cor. 9:15, Jude 24,25).

We will look at some of these instances of national and personal salvation, and the songs which attach to them.

### **(iii) What are the Modes of Praise?**

Praise is of two orders:- (a) Spontaneous, occasioned by sudden understanding of God, and who He is and what He has done, especially where His character and deed affect the worshipper. (b) Commanded praise, either to Israel as the people of God, the inhabitants of the earth as obligated to God, or in the church. It does not mean that commanded praise is necessarily less of the heart. Love also is commanded, and so love is seen to be a matter of the will. Likewise praise. It is true obedience to praise.

As to the modes of praise, they are many. We have mentioned the general ones such as worship, dancing, singing, the use of musical instruments and of course the sacrifices; hence the statement, "the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving". Often the occasion determines the mode. Sacrificial modes are set. Spontaneous happenings such as victory songs are dependent upon that kind of occasion. Some of the musical expression comes as the result of great training, and is even expressed formally. We may now proceed to examine these modes and their occasions.

#### **(a) Celestial Praise**

The Scriptures contain a beautiful story of heavenly praise. Job 38:4-7 speaks of the time of creation, especially of this world, and says that at its inception

"... the morning stars sang together,  
and all the sons of God shouted for joy".

This is Hebraic parallelism, for "stars" and "sons of God" are synonymous. They are the angelic creatures of God. Their joy at creation knows no bounds, and we will see that in the Revelation they have lost none of that wonderment, and none of their praise for creation. Doubtless even the evil angels appreciate creation, albeit their use of it is appalling.

In Isaiah 6 there is a rich description of the praise of the seraphim. These beautiful creatures who are "burners" are apparently filled with burning light, and worship God day and night. Their cry of praise is for the absolute holiness of God. They not only say He is holy, but they see that the whole earth is filled with His glory or, even that the whole earth is the fulness of His glory". So deeply do they adore that they cover their face before God with two of their wings, and also cover their feet (symbolically the place of defilement), whilst their other two wings keep them in motion of worship and service.

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<sup>2</sup> Notice passages such as Luke 4:17-19, John 8:31-36, Luke 11:21f., cf. Acts 10:38, I John 3:8 to see the joyful promises of liberation. Notice that these promises were actively fulfilled.

The descriptions of worshipping creatures in Ezekiel are very powerful; so much so, that it is difficult to fully comprehend the glory of God, and the glory that is given to Him. Whilst no actual songs of adoration are described, it is said, "And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of a host..." (1:24, cf. 3:12-13, 10:3-5, etc.). These beautiful creatures are called cherubim.

The vision of Daniel 7 describes God in visionary terms, and in v.10 says that, "A stream of fire issued and came forth from before Him: a thousand thousands served Him ..." This approximates to Rev. 7:15 where the multitudes "serve Him day and night in the Temple", and by "serving" meaning they worshipped Him. Doubtless it is intended we understand praise, worship and service as the one thing.

In the New Testament we have the opening pages describing the praise of the angelic throng as they hear the announcement of the incarnation.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is well-pleased.'" It must be seen here that the praise is to God for His action of salvation for men. Jesus said, later, "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents", meaning, no doubt, that God was gloriously praiseworthy because of His salvation for sinful men. (See Luke 2:8-14, 15:7, 10)

When we come to the modes of praise within the book of the Revelation) we see the four living creatures who seem to be paramount amongst celestial creatures, and indeed in all creation. With them are the twenty-four elders who appear to have their origins amongst men. Then there are the seraphim and cherubim, and other orders of angels. These are not always nominated as such. In Deuteronomy 33:2 Moses depicts the giving of the law, and God coming to Sinai, saying, "He came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand." These holy ones, or hosts of the Lord praise the Lamb in Revelation 5:9-10, and also praise "Him who sits on the throne". This, again, is because of salvation. As we have seen they praise Him in Revelation 4:11 for creation. In this chapter we are told that the living creatures do not cease, day and night in praising God, singing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty!"

In chapter 11, verses 16-18 the elders give thanks to God because the time has come to seal off the end-things. Their praise is for the government of God, and as before they fall down on their faces before God. Previously we are told that they cast down their crowns (of authority), in full and glad submission to God. In chapter 15 it is those who have conquered the Beast and its Image who give praise to God. Here it is the latter (cf. 19:11-21), but what is significant is that they sing "the song of Moses and the Lamb". This is not two songs but one, the old song (cf. Exodus 15:1-18) and the new conflated, making the one. The former is the victory of the first exodus, and the latter the victory of the final exodus, under the true Moses, the Lamb.

We have already noted that in Revelation 19:1-5 God is praised for having vindicated His righteousness in a world of rebellion and evil. Babylon has fallen and God has triumphed. Here it is "the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven."

We conclude then that praise is part of the eternal and supernatural order of things. Those who are nearest God cannot but exclaim in regard to His

nature, and cannot but proclaim to all creation the glory of the Creator Father-Redeemer.

### **(b) Terrestrial Praise**

One thing about praise is that because of its evoked and spontaneous nature, as well as its continued formal expression, there is little if any theory of praise in the Scriptures. Since God is praiseworthy, and ought to be praised, that is where the matter both begins and ends. Praise is something which is done by creation, and requires no planned methods. Praise sometimes bursts out without being commanded or demanded. It is truly natural to praise.

Nevertheless we can trace regular patterns of praise, both as to the mode of its expression, and the times of its utterance. We cannot but believe Abel's offering was one of praise and gratitude. Sacrifice is a recognition of worth due to God. In Psalm 90 the singer says, "Satisfy us in the morning with Thy steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days". He adds, "Let Thy work be manifest to Thy servants, and Thy glorious power to their children." Praise issues from this knowledge. Hence Cain was reprehensible for not seeing the nature of God as did his brother Abel. Noah offers a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and it comes as a "pleasing odour" to God.

Thus we find in the Mosaic Law that sacrifice was intended, often, to indicate praise and thanksgiving. Leviticus 7:11-21 describes sacrifice presented as thanksgiving, and we have seen that this is a recognition of the goodness of God, and, virtually, praise. Bringing the first-fruits to the altar is also a form of thanksgiving-praise (Deut. 26:1-11). David penetrated to the truth of sacrifice when he said it was "a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart", i.e. a total acknowledgement of the nature of God in holiness. There was no true praise where there was pride, arrogance and presumption, however meticulous the offering may have been. Hebrews 13:15, then, is an important verse, for it sums up true sacrifice by saying, "Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name." He means, "Every time we utter His name, coming to Him, let our utterances be as offering praise. Let this be our sacrifice". What we need to keep in mind is that sacrifice is not a painful matter, necessarily, but in fact an offering of joy. In Deut. 27:7 and Numbers 10:10 joy is to be the note in the presence of God as sacrifice is offered. The cause for this is seen in Hosea 14:2, "Take away all iniquity", they say to the Lord, "Accept what is good, and we will render the fruit of the lips". Psalm 119:108 adds, "Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me Thy ordinances".

The modes of praise, then, have been through sacrifice, expressions of gratitude, adoration, singing, music playing, silent meditation, obedience in action. In Israel there were morning and evening sacrifices. Whilst one could worship personally, yet primarily God's people worshipped corporately (Psalm 42:4), and this was done with joy. There were psalms, eventually, which fitted the festivals, and other occasions. Often they were sung antiphonally, the people joining in. Praise was often conducted with the worshippers standing, and lifting their arms, and also clapping their hands. The command to clap hands or raise arms is plentiful in Scripture. The singing psalms 93, and 95-100 would be much used, since they evoked the spirit of praise<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Note:- We have left the actual songs and expressions of praise which attach to certain events (e.g. Songs of Hannah, Miriam, Hezekiah, etc.) so as to deal with them more fully in Section II of this study.

It would be difficult to list the various occasions of praise, seeing they are so many. The times of offerings and worship would be the commanded and more formalised occasions, but we must not think they are necessarily less real or authentic because commanded. True obedience - from the heart - is what makes such praise not merely formal, but as real as praise which is involuntary. As we have suggested, praise comes at times for God's creational actions, the ways of His government and providence, His salvation, and the ultimate goals He has set for His universe. Deep gratitude and involuntary praise comes often when there has been a local blessing or deliverance, or significant promise and fulfilment.

In the New Testament, particularly, we see the Temple praise and worship carried on, and for a period the Christians join with their Jewish brethren at the Temple in Jerusalem or provincial synagogues. This gradually changes. At Pentecost a whole new burst of liberation and praise eventuated. To examine the praise and worship of the new believers is very rich. They are filled with the love of God, the joy of their salvation, and the peace that is both justification and its consequent tranquillity. Out of this the children of God praise their Father, and obey their Lord, Jesus Christ.

In passages such as I Cor. Chs. 12-14, Romans 12, I Peter 4:10-12 we pick up the fact that their worship was dynamic. In I Cor. 14 Paul points to the shared nature of worship and praise. Certain gifts are given for this ministry and are to be exercised for the edification of the whole congregation. Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are now part of the new worship. At the same time (Rom. 12:1-2, Heb. 13:15) one's life is to be the expression of praise and worship.

It is evident that N.T. believers have so much for which to praise God. Hence the appearance of snatches of songs and hymns, embedded in the fabric of the epistles. Only this sort of praise makes sense of the praises which are to be in eternity. The songs and worship shown in the Revelation are quite understandable in the light of praise which the church gives here to God.

We conclude then that earthly praise takes (and has taken) many and varied forms. The principle is the same in the new era as in the old; it is the worth of God, known by His actions, which stirs men to praise, especially as they become beneficiaries of this goodness of God.

## **SECTION TWO: THE FORMS OF PRAISE**

Our study has been made a little difficult because we have been unable to enlarge on the singing, dancing, music and instrumentation by means of which some of man's praise is expressed. Whilst the division in our study is somewhat artificial yet we need to examine these elements for themselves, as we now do.

### ***(i) SINGING***

Singing is quite a practice within the times of the Bible. If we limit our inquiry 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 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 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".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See also David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (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.

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 in 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:

"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 great use, since they require understanding which is not available to us.<sup>5</sup>

The Psalms<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> For a full treatment of the music as such see the articles on "music" in "The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible", Vol. 3, pp.457-476 and "Hastings Dictionary of the Bible" Vol. 3, pp. 456-463.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of the psalms see "The New Dictionary of the Bible" (I.V.F.), article "Psalms, Book of" pp. 1053-1059.

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 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.

### (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 'sackbutt'. The latter word is used in the A.V., the former in the R.S.V. It is thought to be a seven-stringed 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.

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.

## SECTION THREE: CONCLUSION OF PRAISE

### *(I) The Nature of Praise*

We have seen that praise is the recognition of worth, and the appreciative expression of that knowledge. We have also seen that there is a certain excitation of the appreciative faculty of the one who praises. Out of this excitation comes articulation, so that it is thought that the root meaning of the Hebrew "hallal" (to praise) means "to break out (in a cry)", whilst the Assyrian "alalu" (cf. Heb "halleljah" = "praise the Lord") means "shout for joy". Other words in the Hebrew such as "yada" and "zamar" are action words. The first was associated with bodily actions and gestures which were part of the praising with the thought of confessing, and the second was associated with the playing of music or singing. Hence, as we have observed, the praise of God's people was active, even demonstrative, often uninhibited and certainly most joyful.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason we gather that praise arises out of a high level of appreciation of the person or object admired and praised. In Genesis 1 it is evident that God delights in His creation. A number of times He sees "it is good" and finally, "it is very good". That is it is excellent within itself, and so praiseworthy. The problem that man has about praise is that he came to refuse true honour and glory to God, and so became unthankful. How could he be thankful to that which he had rejected as deficient? Hence his thanksgiving and praise were killed. Even so, in spite of himself, man often has to praise. The Fall of man simply meant that man was out of focus with the creation. Hence praise died.

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<sup>7</sup> The article referred to in "Hastings Dictionary of the Bible" has a comprehensive coverage of the varied nature of praise and its accompanying elements of actions.

With the coming of reconciliation, man in Christ became a new creation (II Cor. 5:17) and so his sense of the perfection of things was rehabilitated. The new man has a stunning sense of the greatness and goodness of God. Hence he is filled with joy, with peace, with pleasure and ejaculates his enjoyment, his well-being, and so praises the goodness and grace of God. It is no wonder, in these states, that humanity sings, dances, and seeks the aid of musical instruments to express the inexpressible - the praise of God. No action can be said to be too extreme, too demonstrative. In fact a tension arises where praise cannot be fully articulated. According to the culture of the one praising, praise will take various forms.

This is not to say that involuntary or spontaneous praise lacks intelligence. Man is competent to develop skills and praise is one of his skills. Hence this can be developed, thoughtfully. The use of instruments in music, and of forms of bodily gestures and even dancing must come under ratiocination, and so become part of intelligible expression. The facts are that in the history of the Jews and Christians an enormous wealth of music, worship expression, and dancing has been built up, to say nothing of the treasury of psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs. It seems that man reaches his highest in these forms of expressions, and particularly as they are focused upon God.

### *(ii) The Constant Impediment To Praise*

The prayer, "Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise" indicates that man needs assistance from God in order to praise. This is primarily because of sin in the world, and presence of hostile evil powers. The latter seek to shape the thinking of man after their own views. Since they hate God and oppose Him they also belittle His creation, and seek to bring it to depravity, bondage and obscenity. Man is faced with what seem to be "the facts" about the universe. They are in fact the lies and not the truth.

When man is redeemed he is still faced with these forces. When he meditates and lives in the presence of God he comes to see things - at least for that time - as they really are, and his being is filled with wonder. His sight of the universe, and of God as Creator, Provider, Redeemer, and Father, is all too much for him. He confesses what he is (and what he is not!) in acts of repentance, humility and faith, and is in living union with the God of creation. His being is thus flooded with wonder, adoration and gratitude, that he praises without difficulty.

It is interesting in the New Testament that two elements are needed for a man to live in continual praise (a) The Word of God, and (b) The Spirit of God. Colossians 3:16 exhorts the reader to let the Word of God dwell in the heart, richly, and in all wisdom. Ephesians 5:18 calls for the hearer to "go on being filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings revelation, illumination, wisdom and understanding. He is the one who can give the "garment of joy for the spirit of heaviness", and can turn mourning into dancing. This is seen by the various effusions of the Spirit in the Scriptures, for a change takes place in man. When great events happen such as forgiveness, liberation and the like, people praised Jesus. When this happens today the same responses follow. Only the perverse will withhold praise and adoration.

It will be seen then that praise and adoration will proceed from faith. What we call "sight" so often depicts failure in the world, and God as not present, loving, and concerned. Again man reacts against the judgements and discipline of God and sees no cause for praise. Faith will see the reasonableness and desirability of both. Hence in the midst of all things which appear

to degenerate God, faith will know that "in all things God is working for good for them that love Him" (Rom. 8:28). This amazing verse is not saying that everything is good which happens, but that everything which happens is used for the good of those who love God. This must mean that in the ultimate there is nothing for which man may not praise God! Hence the injunctions, "always and for all things giving thanks", "in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God", "giving thanks in all circumstances". These draw us to the conclusion that a man's life should be one of praise continually - whatever!

We draw the conclusion then that praise will issue from one who walks by faith and not by sight, whose true sight comes by faith, and whose faith is not dependent upon sight.

### *(iii) The New Song*

As we have seen, singing has always occupied the people of God, especially in their praising of God. Yet throughout the history of man there has been an incessant singing by the human race. More often than not it contains the elements of surprise and joy at the world in which it lives. Sometimes it burbles over small and insignificant things. Sometimes it is concerned, grossly, with the "goodies" of life. At other times it sings songs of defilement and horror, of loneliness and pain. Sometimes its songs are bizarre and mocking, blase and bitter. Humanity, by its songs, can ring the changes on its own moods and attitudes.

But the "New Song": what is that? The Scriptures speak of the new song. Psalm 96:1 says, "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!" Like any other praise psalm this one has to be read to be known, and thought upon to be understood, and sung to be experienced. It is a call for man to let pure praise flow from his heart. His pure object, for pure worship, is the Eternal.

What is meant then, by the "new song"? Surely it means that every experience and action of praise is a new fresh thing which a single person, or a corporate body of worshippers, or indeed the entire creation, expresses and which is given in that moment when all that God is comes afresh to the worshippers. In the case of Psalm 96 it was the occasion when the Ark of the Lord, after its many strange happenings, had been brought to Jerusalem. Prior to this David had appointed the Levites as singers and musicians to "raise sounds of joy". Hence when the Ark comes they do this. Thus a "new song" is an outburst of joy on a new or fresh occasion when the wonder of God comes through to the human heart. Because God is ever doing things - things of creation, of providence and salvation - men, in their rare and wonderful moments of awareness, suddenly understand, and then it is that their praise thrills forth.

In this sense, then, the songs of Moses and Miriam, of Hannah, Deborah and Barak, Zechariah, Mary and Simeon, are all new songs. Often the psalmist calls for a song, as though he sees the urgency of a newly created song for this very special occasion. The call of a new song comes a number of times, and sometimes the singer says, "I will sing a new song" (see Psa. 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 149:1, and 144:9). Generally, however, the singer sees God as giving them the songs. In Job 35:10 Elihu has been speaking of those who are oppressed and do not seek God for relief. He speaks of God as "My Maker, the One who gives songs in the night". That is, at the darkest times, the time of loneliness God gives songs. His comfort and joy flow purely from Him, and not by human

means. Hence in Psalm 42:8 David says, "By day the Lord commands His steadfast love, and at night His song is with me." This is very beautiful! David says, in Psalm 40:3, "He has put a new song in my mouth". He means, "He has delivered me out of the pit, and now I cannot but sing. However the song is not a lifeless repetition of one I have heard or even made, but it is my song, new and fresh and glowing." Bildad said, "He will fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting." This is what the liberated captives said as they travelled to Zion, "Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongues with singing!" The deepest, richest songs are from those who have gone through suffering and now sing with a rich and mature wisdom, not known to the uninitiated - who have not suffered.

Hence when we come to the 144,000 in Revelation, chapter 14, we see these strong, clean men who have remained undefiled. They sing a new song. No wonder! The name of the Father is written on their foreheads, they exult in the sheer joy of purity, of total loyalty to the Eternal God. and so wonderful is their experience that they have access to the throne, and sing their song, without any sense of shame, before the living creatures and the elders. If the rich experience of God had not been theirs then they could not have sung the new song.

The new song experience, then is that of the people of God. When it speaks in the N.T. of having our being continuously filled with the Spirit (Ephes. 5:18), and letting the Word of God dwell richly in our heart, with all wisdom (Col. 3:16) then it means that this filled person sees and knows, continually, the wonderful works of God. To him every detail of this marvellous creation is from the hand of the Creator-Father. He is filled with joy and amazement as he considers the tiny lilies of the field, beautiful but ephemeral. He is overflowing with awe as he considers "the works of Thy hands, the sun and the moon and the stars which Thou hast made", and when the glories of salvation flood his mind and heart, he cannot but look up and praise the God of heaven. No wonder, in the N.T. there are "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs", and no doubt most of these were on-the-spot, spontaneously born. To "sing in the Spirit" may or may not have been words of another, and less-limiting language. Scholars debate this, but no one debates that to sing in the Spirit is to know a freedom, joy, spontaneity and adoration that is other than the careful elaborations of the conscious mind, toiling at composition. The new song is the true spontaneous praise of which the entire Scriptures speak.

Let us not, however, be deceived into thinking that such worship is only from a sudden new sight of God, and that its reality lies in having a different song from songs which have gone before. The "new songs" of David, Asaph and the others were sung for centuries and are still being sung. The wonderful moment of their composition has passed but not the freshness and substance of them. Such songs last for all time and may even be sung in eternity (Rev. 15:3).

The vital point is that the true songs are given by God. Whilst they are composed by creatures, they are given by the Creator. There is no contradiction in this statement. All that man has he has been given. All that he does properly he does in obedience. Hence when God's people are rebellious they lose their songs. Each of us knows that with personal rebellion or disobedience the songs that were rich to us become stale and lifeless. God told Israel she would lose her place as a singing people. In Ezekiel 26 the prophet warns of impending doom. The Babylonians will come, "and I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more". In suffering and sorrow, it is simply that the songs of joy and praise naturally cease. In Amos

5:23 God tells Israel to "Take away from me the noise of your songs", and says, "to the melody of your harps I will not listen." He then speaks of the context in which songs are truly valid,

"But let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream".

Speaking of the judgement to come He says, "The songs of the temple shall become wailing in that day", and "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and your songs into lamentation."

In Isaiah 24:1-13 we see the suffering of the earth when it is said, "The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled." In verses 14-16 the holy remnant of Israel are of a different timbre. They sing wonderful praise for, "They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the Lord they shout from the west ... from the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One." In Isaiah 30 there is the prophecy of Israel's suffering, and then of their renewal when God will give "a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and the gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the Lord, the Rock of Israel." (v.29) This too is the new song, as against the tasteless old song, sung apathetically in rebellion.

#### *(iv) General Conclusion*

Man is closest to his true being when he praises God. All troubles began when man was not grateful, and refused to honour God. All joy comes when he honours God and makes thanksgiving. We have seen that when God is real to him, then his own self becomes most real to him. Praise is the privilege God has given to the human race to express its creatureliness and to revel in its dependency upon Father-God. No one can possibly understand the extent of the impact of music and singing, let alone its glorious qualities as the medium of praise-expression.

It is not our intention to comment upon the modes of musical expression, instrumentally, vocally, or in the operations of dancing and jubilation. One principle is obvious - that the modes must be consonant with the expression of worship, and the object of adoration. Idolatry has taught us that man is immediately affected by the object of his worship. What we worship evokes the kind of praise we give. We may give wrong worship to God because we do not see Him as He is. Hence worship in the Spirit (John 4:22-24, Phil.3:3 etc.) can alone be true worship, for it is in Spirit and in truth. Hence it is true to say that the object of our worship gives us both the songs we sing, the praise we utter, and the modes we use for expression.

So vast is the scope of praise - as vast as God Himself! - that we conclude, not with a sense of having covered our subject, but of just beginning to know it, much less being competent to express the praise that God's greatness and goodness would evoke within us.

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