

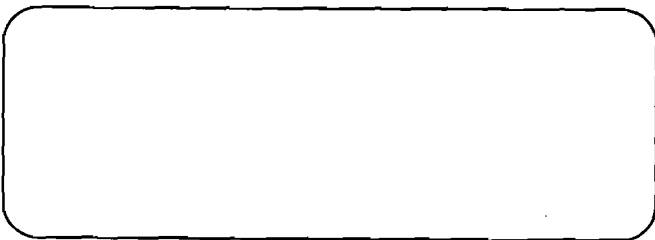
area of worship, it is not for us to determine what is pleasing to God, but for Him alone. Our first concern is to discern His desire and to follow His revealed will, not to arrange a service that is most pleasing and satisfying to us.

## Using Instruments to Aid the Mood of Worship

Some Christians will say, "What difference does it make? The organ helps us to get into the mood of worship and the guitar or the orchestra adds a lot to the service." To them, that's enough to sanction the use of instruments in worship. It is interesting to note that the same persons who use instruments as an aid to their worship may condemn the group that uses statues as aids to their worship. But is there any real difference between the two? Both are aids to worship, and both are man's own innovations, unauthorized in the holy Scriptures.

Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23). This reminds us that worship is a very significant and intimate encounter with God, and something that He desires from His people. When we engage in worship, we should realize that we are able to give God pleasure if we come to Him with a right attitude, and if we approach Him in accordance with the truth He has revealed. Singing heartfelt praise, unaccompanied, which expresses the fullness of our joy in Christ, makes a melody well pleasing in God's sight.

In response to this discussion, I hope you will give consideration to your own practice of worship, and heed the challenge in Hebrews 13:15-16: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. . . . for with such sacrifices God is pleased."



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# WHAT ABOUT INSTRUMENTS IN WORSHIP?

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**Robert B. McCracken**

THE CHIMES WERE STRIKING 11 O'CLOCK AND ALL the people were seated in their pews ready for the church service to begin. The organist began to play very softly and a hush came over the whole assembly. It seemed to be the perfect atmosphere for worship. Then the organ became louder, and everyone stood to his feet and began to sing.

This familiar worship scene is so common and so emotionally satisfying that it may seem almost sacrilegious to raise a question about it. But it is wise to continually reexamine all our activities in the light of Scripture, and especially this area of worship, because worship is one of our most direct approaches to God. It is an area where He Himself declares that He is rightly jealous.

The first and second commandments teach regarding worship that we are not to acknowledge other gods, or fashion images to our own liking, but rather are to follow carefully the guidelines and directions that God has given us in His Word. The *Westminster Catechism* declares: "The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His word." Only when we follow God's own directives will we be sure that we are truly pleasing Him in our worship, and are not simply catering to our own wishes.

There is no question about the fact that musical instruments appeal to the ear and emotions of mankind. We all recognize them to be a rich and good gift of God for our enjoyment and pleasure, but the question we are wanting to investigate here is, "What place, if any, do musical instruments have in the worship of God?" This is an important question in the light of what we have said above, and a very interesting one to explore in both Testaments of Scripture.

## Introduction of Instruments into the Worship of God

The first place in which man gave praise to God was in the garden of Eden. Adam, as he walked with God in the cool of the day, would express to Him his adoration and praise. We can imagine no more wonderful experience than to be able to worship God in His very presence. In the account of this supreme fellowship between God and man, we find no mention of the use of instruments to create the proper mood or to help express to the Creator the praise due His name; nor would it seem reasonable, because Adam's praise was the expression which God had given him.

No mention of instruments is made in the Scriptures until we come to one of Cain's descendants named Jubal. In

Genesis 4:20-21, we read, "Adah gave birth to Jubal: he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all who play the harp and flute." This is the first mention of instruments in the Bible, and they are listed along with many of the other arts and crafts that the descendants of Cain developed. There is no indication here that they were used in any kind of worship ceremony.

From this point on, the references to the use of instruments become more prevalent. A reference in Genesis 1:27 shows that the art of instrumental music was carried on after the Flood, for in the time of Jacob, his father-in-law Laban said: "Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps?" This again has no reference to worship, but rather to a going-away party.

When we come to the time of Moses there is a change. Moses received many commands of God touching many areas of life, and these commands include a specific reference to instruments. Numbers 10:1 says: "The Lord said to Moses: 'Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out.'" Here God not only commanded Moses to make these instruments, but He also told him the specific purpose they were to fulfill, namely for calling the assembly, and for use as signals on the battlefield (cf. v. 9).

But then God adds an additional use. Numbers 10:10 says: "Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the Lord your God." Here is the first specific command of God regarding the appointment and use of instruments related to worship. In this passage it is important to notice that they were directly associated with the ceremonial rituals, that is, the offerings and sacrifices.

It is in the time of David that we find the most significant change in the development of instrumental music in the worship of God. David, in 1 Chronicles 15:16, "told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: flutes, harps and cymbals." Here, David gives a directive that instruments are to be used by the Levites in their service to God. While in this specific passage we find no mention of a command of God to do this, elsewhere we can find positive proof that it was God who gave the command. The passage is 2 Chronicles 29:25, which

describes the days of King Hezekiah. "He stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets."

As with Moses, again we see that the appointment of instruments in the worship of God came as a direct command of God. It is also important to note in this passage how the instruments were used. Reading on, it says: "So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed" (vs.26-28)

As the record continues, notice the distinction that is made here between the offering of the sacrifices and the other part of their worship. "When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped" (2 Chron 29:29-30). In this second part of the worship, there is no indication that the instruments were used—rather, the text would lead us to believe that when the offerings were finished the use of instruments stopped.

This suggests a most significant point. Throughout the Old Testament, the use of instruments in the worship of God is related directly to the temple service. This temple ritual with all of its ceremonial requirements was typical and symbolic in nature, and pointed to the eventual coming of Christ, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. W. D. Killen, in his *History, Doctrine, and Worship in the Ancient Church*, says: "As the sacrifices, offerings and other observances of the temple, as well as the priests, the vestments, and even the building itself, had an emblematic meaning; the singing, intermingled with the music of various instruments of sound, was also typical and ceremonial" (p.213). With the coming of Christ the ceremonial system came to an end.

The passages we have cited thus far indicate these basic facts: the use of instruments was introduced into the worship of God first through Moses and then more elaborately by David; this was done by the direct command of God; and these instruments were directly related

to the temple worship which was ceremonial in nature.

Having seen the introduction of musical instruments into the worship practices of the Old Testament saints, let us now explore the evident removal of those instruments from the worship practices of the New Testament saints. We believe in both cases that this was done through the direct counsel and action of God.

## Removal of Instruments from the Worship of God

There is not a trace in the complete New Testament of the use of instruments in the Church of Jesus Christ or in the worship of the Apostles. This seems strange if God intended this practice to continue. The accounts we have of when Christ entered into worship give no indication that instruments were used. References in the writings of Peter, John, Paul and other New Testament authors to using instruments in worship are nonexistent. Rather we find such statements as "make music in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19) and "offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name" (Heb. 13:15).

Further evidence of the removal of instruments from the worship of God after the Old Testament period is that in the early church (i.e., the period following the Apostles) there were no instruments used in the churches. The early church fathers bear testimony against the use of instruments. Justin Martyr, who lived 150 years after Christ, has this to say: "Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and cymbals. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children are laid aside, and plain singing only retained."

Another church father, Chrysostom, who lived 400 years after Christ, says, "Instrumental music was permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off to idols; but now instead of instruments we use our bodies to praise Him withal. . . . Instruments appertain not to Christians."

History bears witness that there is no evidence of instrumental music in the churches until the 7th Century. In the year 666 A.D. one of the popes of the Roman Catholic church, Pope Vitalian, brought into his worship Latin singing to the accompaniment of the organ. This is the first time instruments were formally used in worship since the time of the Jewish ceremonial ritual.

The Roman church adopted this practice, and it continued until the time of the Reformers. Striving to return to the purity of worship and obedience to the law of God, many

of the Reformers cast out the use of instruments in their worship service.

John Calvin made this statement: "Instrumental music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic law—in popery, a ridiculous and unsuitable imitation of the Jews, they employed organs and such other ludicrous things, by which the word and worship of God are exceedingly profaned."

To summarize, we have seen that no mention is made of using instruments in worship in the New Testament. Neither Christ nor His apostles advocated it, nor was it a practice in the Church for nearly 700 years after Christ. Later, in the Reformation, in order to purify the worship, godly leaders cast out the instruments from their worship services.

## Reasons Why Instruments Were Not Continued in the N.T. Church

Let us now list some reasons for the change in worship after the time of Christ. The primary reason for the removal of the instruments from worship is that the perfect sacrifice of Christ did away with all the ceremonial ritual (cf. Heb. 9—10). The instruments, as has been shown, were directly connected with the sacrificial system; and thus when Christ fulfilled and abolished the sacrifices, the instruments went with them. There is no need to seek God through the Mosaic forms and symbols, because Christ has provided a new and living way to God. Thus the early Christians leaving the ceremonial rituals to follow the living Christ would naturally leave the instruments which belonged to them.

The experiences of the Old Testament believer were genuine, but they lacked something of the reality, completeness, and joy that was to be experienced later through Christ. Because of this, God enhanced their sense of involvement and joy through "sound effects"—trumpets, cymbals, and harps.

We know the value of sound effects. When watching a movie, the emotional involvement and sense of reality is enhanced by the music. In a similar way, in the Old Testament, when God was showing His people His great redemption through pictures and ceremonies, He used sound effects (i.e., instrumental accompaniment). These instruments created a sense of excitement and joy when the people witnessed the substitution of an animal being sacrificed for them.

On the other hand, our joy no longer needs to be

expressed symbolically, because Christ said: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Christ has promised to give us now the fullness of what the forms of the Old Testament were only a symbol.

A second reason for discontinuing the use of instruments in worship is that the New Testament specifically tells us that this joy and praise which fills our hearts as Christians is to be expressed from the heart through our lips. Hebrews 13:15, which we mentioned before, states: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name."

Also, we are to "make music in [our] hearts" (Eph. 5:19). The Greek word for "make music" is *psallo*, which means originally "to pluck the strings of an instrument." This gives a beautiful picture of what true and acceptable praise of God really is. Since the word *psallo* cannot be separated from the word "heart," it literally means "plucking the strings of your heart to the Lord." When the music of the heart is expressed through lips that confess the Lord's name, there is no need for supporting instruments.

Another interesting reason why early Christians did not use instruments in their worship was that the New Testament church was patterned after the Jewish synagogue and not after the temple. One Jewish historian, after describing the temple ritual, has this to say: "The worship of the synagogue was more simple. Its officers did not intrude instrumental music into the congregational services. The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue; and when they celebrated the praise of God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, their melody was the fruit of the lips."

Archaeologists have found no instruments of music among the furniture of the ancient synagogues. And even today in the Orthodox Jewish synagogue no instruments are used (confirming the idea that instruments were tied to the ceremonial system and temple worship). The Christian Church in its original state was patterned after the synagogue, and therefore the instruments had no place in their worship.

We should note that this discussion speaks directly to the matter of Christian worship and not to the use of instruments in other settings. As we said earlier, the development of musical instruments and the skill with which they are played is truly a gift of God and is to be enjoyed by God's people as a part of His wonderful grace to mankind. Surely much glory can be brought to God as each musician develops his or her skill for Christ's honor. However, in the