

Lead Worshippers

Over recent years, churches have asked people to lead worship in church. This has arisen from a practical necessity, a way of doing worship that has become popular, and because God has been moving in power through worship.

As we know, people are changed in worship. This talk seeks to look at musical worship as we realise that worship is so much more than music. However, in recent times there has been a move that seeks to almost undermine the position of worship leader and of music in worship, in favour of words, prophecies, Bible readings due to an interpretation of 1 Peter 2.9 which is incomplete. There is no doubt that worship can / should include words, prophecies, Bible readings – but music has a power that is quite unique. This talk will look at musical worship.

Modern day priests – 1 Peter 2.9

1 Peter 2.9 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

The New Testament is clear from this verse that while there were priests in the Old Testament (the Levites), today we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. When we look at the Greek, we understand that if you are a Christian then God has specifically called you out of the world; he has set you apart, separated you from others who are not part of his kingdom. God has purchased you to be his specific holy people.

Some people argue that this verse means that there shouldn't be worship leaders or even worship bands in our churches today, because we are now all priests. In the Old Testament, the argument is that there were priests set aside to do the music, but now that we are all priests, we are all set aside to do the music.

However, this is an incomplete argument that doesn't set 1 Peter 2.9 into the context of the whole Bible. This is also an argument that does not properly unpack the relationship between the Old and New Testament, or an understanding of the Levites.

The Old and New Testament (OT and NT)

The Old and New Testaments cannot be set apart. When we read the OT, we cannot simply reject things on an easy basis because we are no longer living in OT times. (When people say this, they mean (rightly) that because of what Jesus has done, we are no longer under the law but have been given freedom in Jesus by what he did on the Cross, and we have the Holy Spirit inside us now. In the Old Testament, the temple was a building that God inhabited. Now the temple is our bodies where the Holy Spirit lives.)

But the mistake is to separate the Old and New. The 'Old' and 'New' Testaments are simply breaks put into the Bible (like chapters and verses) to help us navigate around the Bible more easily. Yes there is a real difference between the two, but we cannot take one without considering the other.

For example, some people talk about the 'New Testament church'. It is hard to even find one model for this (and why should we copy it anyway!) in the Bible. But because the Bible is a complete book – Old and New – we can't take one out of the context of the other. The OT is a 'foreshadowing' of the NT. This means that many times in the OT, we find a picture of what would happen in the NT. So for example, Joseph was a 'type' of Jesus. By this we mean that Joseph showed characteristics and situations that pointed to Jesus – he was abandoned by his brothers ('disciples'), he was unfairly accused, he was sent ahead by God to save his people etc. The sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham is one of many other pictures of the Father and Son (God and Jesus).

So the OT is essential in thinking about and understanding the NT.

Therefore we cannot simply and quickly say we're in NT times now because the OT acts as a model for what we do now. There is a difference between the two, of course! But the difference isn't an easy OT vs NT, it's about the law in the OT and God's grace through Jesus in the NT. So for example, Israel gave 10% under law in the OT, but people in the church give in the NT out of their hearts (recognising that the church is separate from Israel, it has not replaced Israel). In the OT, God told Israel "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean" (Lev 10.10). In the NT,

So we can't discount OT models in favour of NT models, as the OT is an example for us today. This is more than simply learning from the OT, or having good examples from the OT. Instead, the OT is a picture (not fully complete) of what God would do through Jesus and the giving of his Holy Spirit to those who believe in him. This is why we need to understand the relationship between the OT and NT.

Satan's fall – music has power

There are some people who consider that satan was the 'worship leader' in heaven. This interpretation comes from the fact that in the NKJV, Ezekiel 28.13 which has the phrase, *"The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes"*. Some have used the interpretation of the word 'timbrels' and 'pipes' to mean musical worship. However, from the Hebrew this is not so clear and within the context of the passage, it is clearly referring to someone's outfit adorned with precious stones. The NIV translates the same line, *"Your settings and mountings were made of gold."* Indeed, there is some confusion about the Hebrew meaning of the whole of Ezekiel 28.13!

The whole of Ezekiel 28.1-19 itself is about the 'King of Tyre'. Some are not quite sure whether this refers to satan at all, and if it does, what the meaning is. However, it is clear that the Prince of Tyre was a real person, so who is this mysterious 'King of Tyre'?! We'd suggest this is Satan, the 'power' behind the Prince of Tyre. For example, it's quite clear that the Prince of Tyre (a real human being) was not 'on the holy mount of God' (Ezekiel 28.14) or in Eden (Ezekiel 28.13)! So this Prince of Tyre (a fallen 'created' being) is Satan and Ezekiel prophesies his end and destruction – reduced to ashes, coming to a horrible end (Ezekiel 28.18-19)

Firstly, that these verses are referring to Satan and his fall from heaven. Indeed, when we read Ezekiel 28.14 that this person was 'anointed', the Hebrew word used is 'mimshach' which is from the root word 'mashach' meaning anointed. However, the word

'mimshach' (according to Strongs) has this definition, "From mashach, in the sense of expansion; outspread (i.e. With outstretched wings) — anointed." So some see satan defined here as a cherub covering the throne of God (as we see this in Revelation 4.8). **Secondly**, people see this as referring to a contemporary King of Tyre as an actual person at the time. **Thirdly**, Ezekiel 28.2-5 suggests that there will be an end-time person who will rise up as an anti-Christ figure.

Fourth we learn that the precious stones that satan ('King of Tyre') wore are very similar to those mentioned in Exodus 28.17-20. In Ezekiel 28 (speaking of the holy priests) we learn there were 12 precious stones, in 4 rows of 3 precious stones:

"Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. The first row shall be carnelian, chrysolite and beryl; the second row shall be turquoise, lapis lazuli and emerald; the third row shall be jacinth, agate and amethyst; the fourth row shall be topaz, onyx and jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings."

In Ezekiel 28.13 we find the 'King of Tyre' wore every carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. The settings and mountings were made of gold. However, in this situation the wearer ('King of Tyre') only had 3 rows of 3 precious stones.

What we do know is that satan had so much, but wanted more. He desired to be worshipped instead of God. So God cast him out of heaven. We can also see this confirmed from Isaiah 14.12-14:

"How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit."

Why do we write all this? Regardless of whether satan was actually a worship leader or whether he was simply an anointed (perhaps special) angel who God removed because of his pride and evil, we do know that today, satan's purpose is to turn worship away from God to himself. He comes to steal, kill and destroy anything, anyone (John 10.10). Today, he is hard at work through music to destroy any worship of God and to turn the hearts of the world (especially young people) against God, and towards the evil one.

The Levites – all playing their different parts

There is sometimes a mistake regarding the Levites in the Old Testament that they simply performed musical duties. But the Levites were responsible for ministering in the house of the Lord (the temple) in many ways.

1 Chronicles 9.13 – "The priests, who were heads of families, numbered 1,760. They were able men, responsible for ministering in the house of God."

1 Chronicles 9 details the many kinds of things that the Levites were responsible for gatekeeping, taking care of temple articles, looking after furnishings, mixing spices and the oil and wine, others for breaking bread, others for preparing for every Sabbath. These were detailed and different duties. We then go on to read that others were musicians.

1 Chronicles 9.33 – “Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night.”

So when thinking about the Levites, we must first recognise that not all were necessarily musicians. Some were set apart as musicians. When we think of any New Testament thinking about worship and being the priesthood of all believers, we still have to conclude that some people are set aside (from within the church body) to be musicians and involved in musical worship. Yes, we are all priests before God. But we all have our unique part to play in love (see 1 Corinthians 12). One of those parts is musical. Not everyone is called to be a musician (thank goodness!!)

Music as a key element in the OT

Nevertheless, music was an essential key in the Old Testament. When walking around Jericho, there was a ram's horn blown, the people shouted and then the walls came tumbling down. Before others battles, the horn was played. Music and corporate worship has a battle-side to it and often precedes God moving on our behalf. The same is true today when we worship God, on our own or with others, God does something special and unique! We also find worship in the book of Revelation, with the creatures surrounding the throne declaring, 'holy holy holy is the Lord'. Revelation 7.10 also has multitudes shouting before God declaring that he alone is worthy. So it is clear that music has a unique place in the OT, today in NT times and in heaven!

1 Chronicles 15.16 – “David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals.”

1 Chronicles 15.19-21 – “The musicians Heman, Asaph and Ethan were to sound the bronze cymbals; Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah and Benaiah were to play the lyres according to alamoeth, and Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel and Azariah were to play the harps, directing according to sheminith.”

1 Chronicles 16.5-6 – “Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, 6 and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God.”

1 Chronicles 25.1 – “David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals.”

A Biblical pattern of musical worship

Thirdly, it is clear that music, while for everyone, is for those specifically called and gifted. You don't have people who can't teach or speak up front doing teaching (well, it isn't good practice!!) You don't have people doing things that aren't their gift (beyond doing so to serve or step in for others), as again it isn't good practice. The picture of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 (the church) is one where there are people with specific gifts that God has given to build up the body and touch the world, and secondly where these people are in the right position doing the right things. You don't have someone gifted as a 'foot' trying to act like the 'arm'. Instead, the human body (and the church) where it works effectively, is put together so that every part has a unique part and does it in the right place.

We see this from the OT verses below where Kenaniah was in charge of the singing because he was skilled at it!! We also learn that there were more experienced and gifted musicians at the temple of the Lord who, (a) brought through those younger and less experienced by directly training them, (b) they were still all under the supervision of the King (or today we'd say Jesus as the head of the church), and (c) they were all trained and skilled in music for the Lord. This clearly suggests a pattern of those involved in musical worship being set apart for God and to God – all trained specifically for this and skilled / growing in their skills. This is a great pattern of musical worship that God has ordained in the church, and that we need in order to fully function as the body. But we serve to glorify God alone. It has nothing to do with promoting ourselves. And we must have a heart to improve, learn, serve and be set apart to God. *“Be holy, because I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1.16)

1 Chronicles 15.22 – “Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it.”

1 Chronicles 25.6-7 – “All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD – they numbered 288.”