

What the Bible Says About Music and Worship

by Mike Fortune

The Bible teaches that stringed instruments and percussion instruments belong in our worship services, in the house of God, because they were commanded to be used there by God Himself

1 Samuel 10:5 “After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying.”

1 Chronicles 15:16,19,28 Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy.19 the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound the cymbals of bronze;28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn, with trumpets and with cymbals, making music with stringed instruments and harps.

Notice, he “made music” with the cymbals. Cymbals are percussion instruments

1 Chronicles 16:5,42 Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals;42 and with them Heman and Jeduthun, to sound aloud with trumpets and cymbals and the musical instruments of God. Now the sons of Jeduthun were gatekeepers.

And God was pleased

2 Chronicles 5:12-14

12 and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets— 13 indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: 1 “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever,” that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priest could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

This shows that God was so pleased with the cymbals and the music He just listened to, and his response was so glorious, that the priest couldn’t even continue to minister! God enjoyed it! Even if its loud

2 Chronicles 23:12,13

12 Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people in the temple of the Lord.13 When she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets, also the singers with musical instruments, and those who led in praise. So Athaliah tore her clothes and said, “Treason! Treason!”

God even enjoys loud instruments that last long

2 Chronicles 30:20-21, 23

20 And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. 21 So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments. 23 Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness.

God loves percussion and stringed instruments with loud singing you can hear from far away

Nehemiah 12:27,42,43

27 Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.⁴² also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director.⁴³ Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

A worship service of preaching or prophesying with percussion and stringed instruments is pleasing to God

1 Chronicles 25:1,3,6

Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was:³ Of Jeduthun... who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord.⁶ All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king.

Especially when that worship service takes place in the house of the Lord

2 Chronicles 29:25-27, 30

25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets.²⁶ The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.²⁷ Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. 30 So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

It wasn't just "paid" musicians as some suggest. It was everybody including women who lead worship

Psalms 68:24,25

24 They have seen Your procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. 25 The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; Among them were the maidens playing timbrels.

A timbrel is a drum. It was round piece of wood with a goatskin stretched across the top. In the sanctuary there can be loud clashing cymbals. And drums. A “trap set’ is nothing more than a collection of timbrels. The Bible approves of all instruments

Psalm 150:1-6

1 Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! 2 Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! 3 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! 4 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! 5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! 6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

The Bible approves of singing new songs

Psalm 149:1-3

1 Sing to the Lord a new song, And His praise in the assembly of saints. 2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. 3 Let them praise His name with the dance; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.

Exuberant praise in the sanctuary is not irreverent

Psalm 47:1,2

Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph...Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!

Psalm 63:4

Says in the Sanctuary we are to Lift up my hands in your name.... my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips.

Psalm 66:1

Make a joyful shout to God all the earth!

Psalm 98:1

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! 4. Shout joyfully to the Lord all the earth, break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. 5. Sing to the Lord with the harp, and the sound of a psalm. 6. With trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the lord, the King.

Clapping and Raising Your Hands Is Biblical Too

1 Kings 8:22,38,54

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: 38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: 54 And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

2 Kings 11:11,12

11 And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. 12 And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.

2 Chronicles 6:12,13,29

12 And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands: 13 For Solomon had made a brasen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, 29 Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house:

Nehemiah 8:6-10

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground 8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. 9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Psalms 28:2

2 Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

Psalms 47:1,2

1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah. 10 clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. 2 For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

Psalms 47:5-7

5 God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

Psalms 63:1-4

1 O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; 2 To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. 3 Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. 4 Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Psalms 66:1,2

1 To the chief Musician, A Song or Psalm. 1 Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: 2 Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

Psalms 88:9

9 Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.

Psalms 98:1,4-6,9

1. O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. 4 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. 5 Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. 6 With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King. 8 Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together.

Psalm 119:48

48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

Psalm 138:1

I will praise thee with my whole heart

Psalm 141:2

2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Psalm 143:6

6 I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

Isaiah 55:12

12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Lamentations 2:19

19 Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

Lamentations 3:41

41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

1 Timothy 2:8

8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Hebrews 13:15

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Rightly understood, reverence cannot be limited to silence in the sanctuary. Silence can be part of worship too (Habakkuk 2:20). But must not be limited to that. Many years after the Exodus, this was still the case in the sanctuary of Jesus' day.

Desire of Ages p.463 paragraph 2

“When He spoke these words, Jesus was in the court of the temple specially connected with the services of the Feast of Tabernacles. In the center of this court rose two lofty standards, supporting lampstands of great size. After the evening sacrifice, all the lamps were kindled, shedding their light over Jerusalem. This ceremony was in commemoration of the pillar of light that guided Israel in the desert, and was also regarded as pointing to the coming of the Messiah. At evening when the lamps were lighted, the court was a scene of great rejoicing. Gray-haired men, the priests of the temple and the rulers of the people, united in the festive dances to the sound of instrumental music and the chants of the Levites.”

Would our sanctuary sound different on Sabbath if everyone in it embraced each generation's songs and instruments and sincerely tried to sing them? May we all be willing to sing Christ's praises with every tool and talent God provides. Let us not allow familiarity or fear or ignorance keep us from being supportive of every generation's attempts to sing God's praises. May God bless us as we learn more about music and mature as a church, using our freedom of choice in God honoring ways.