

## Music by the Old Covenant or the New?

Can God be praised with musical instruments? Many of the psalms, like Psalm 150, say He can be praised with trumpets, harps, and cymbals, but is this mode of praise right for the Lord's church?

The New Testament's instruction concerning music in worship includes such passages as these:

- 1 Corinthians 14:15 – What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.
- Ephesians 5:18-19 – <sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.
- Colossians 3:16 – Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

These passages say nothing of musical instruments, but instead they commend singing. Does this mean that instrumental music is excluded?

Consider this. The assembled worship of Israel prescribed by the Old Covenant was conducted first at the tabernacle and then at the temple in Jerusalem. Sacrifices were offered by priests who were designated from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. Service was provided by the Levites, including the service of music. The order of the musicians and singers was appointed by King David as indicated in 1 Chronicles 6:31-32:

<sup>31</sup>Now these are those whom David appointed over the service of song in the house of the LORD, after the ark rested there. <sup>32</sup>They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem; and they served in their office according to their order.

Just as the tabernacle and the temple are now gone, this old form of assembled worship is also gone. Under the New Covenant, the assembled worship of Christians occurs in the church, which is now the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). Sacrifices are offered by Christians, who are all priests before God. Notice 1 Peter 2:5:

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Those spiritual sacrifices include vocal praise as designated in Hebrews 13:15:

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

So then, the former worship of Israel under the Old Covenant had an earthly tabernacle, an earthly priesthood, and earthly sacrifices (see Hebrews 9:1-10). Suitable to this was instrumental music as many of the psalms suggest.

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The present form of worship under the New Covenant has a spiritual tabernacle, a spiritual priesthood, and spiritual sacrifices. Suitable to this is spiritual music, which is the singing of praises to God and exhortations to one another. It is the words that make the music spiritual, just as Jesus said in John 6:63,

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”

When [God] said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear (Hebrews 8:13).

The church shouldn't worship God in an inferior, obsolete way. The church should worship with the superior, spiritual music of singing.

John 4:23-24 – <sup>23</sup>“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”