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## Biblical Perspective of Music and Worship: Implications for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

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### Abstract

One of the purposes for the creation of humanity is to worship God (Rev 14:7) and this is made possible through music. The place of music in worship and its theological significance has occupied the minds of many over the centuries. From a Christian perspective, the Bible should be the final arbiter of all Christian doctrines and practices, including music and worship. What, then, does the Bible teach about music and worship? What lessons can the Seventh-day Adventist Church draw from the biblical perspective of music and worship? With these questions, the study was initiated. The study aims to analyze the biblical concept of music and worship, and its implications for the Adventist Church. The study is significant as it will contribute to existing knowledge on music and worship. The study employed the theological approach to research. The study observed that in both the OT and NT, no worship service was void of music. Also, it was observed that the use of musical instruments in the Bible was subject to the context one finds himself. Moreover, it was seen that the Scripture depicts a well-ordered worship services void of messiness. These, the Adventist Church cannot afford to overlook. The study, therefore, concludes that the church, today, cannot underestimate the essence of music in both private and co-operate worship services.

**Keywords:** Bible, Music, Worship, Adventist Church, Implications

### I. Introduction

Music is a principal ritual of worship in Christendom. Music is considered as the act of giving the entire being of the believer in appreciation of God's gift of Christ.<sup>1</sup> One of the purposes for the creation of humanity is to worship God (Rev 14:7) and this is made possible through music.<sup>2</sup> The place of music in worship and its theological significance has occupied the minds of many over the centuries. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, "music is one of the highest arts, and that good music not only gives us pleasure but elevates our minds and cultivates our finest qualities."<sup>3</sup> At its uncontaminated and finest state, music lifts humanity into the very presence of God where angels and unfallen creatures worship Him in songs. For Spivey, the Bible should be the final arbiter of all Christian doctrines and practices, not ecclesiastical tradition.<sup>4</sup> What, then, does the Bible teach about music and worship? What lessons can the Seventh-day Adventist Church draw from the biblical perspective of music and worship? With these questions, the study is initiated. Therefore, the study aims to analyze the biblical concept of music and worship, and its implications for the Adventist Church. The study is significant as it will contribute to existing knowledge on music and

<sup>1</sup> Howard G. Hageman, *Pulpit and Table* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Sampson M. Nwaomah, Robert Osei-Bonsu, and Kelvin Okey Onongha, *Music and Worship in Africa: Adventists' Dialogue from Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2016), 143.

<sup>4</sup> James T. Spivey Jr., "The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002).

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worship. The study employs the theological approach to research.

The study is divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two deals with music and worship in the Old Testament Music and worship in the New Testament are discussed at the third section. Section four focuses on the implications of biblical perspective of music and worship for the Adventist music and worship whilst section five concludes the study.

## II. Music and Worship in the Old Testament

Human beings apart from procreation were also created to worship God. The Bible provides the role of music in worship that can be a guide to the contemporary worshipper. Acknowledging the greatness of God engenders worship responses from man including praise, adoration, worship, thanksgiving, and prayers to God and about God.<sup>5</sup> This section looks at the role of music and worship in the life of the Israelites in the Old Testament

Herbert Lockyer Jr. writes that “music, both vocal and instrumental, was well cultivated among the Hebrews, the New Testament Christians, and the Christian church through the centuries.”<sup>6</sup> He again asserts that “a look at the Old Testament reveals how God’s ancient people were devoted to the study and practice of music, which holds a unique place in the historical and prophetic books, as well as the psalter.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, one cannot understand church music and worship without looking at what happened in the Old Testament times. Lockyer and the ancient music historian, Theodore Burgh, seems to share the same opinion when the later said that the Bible is filled with cultures full of music so much that the “people used music in their daily lives.”<sup>8</sup> In the OT, God’s people sang to God with great joy and sometimes danced before God when singing. They mostly sang antiphonally<sup>9</sup> as seen after the Red Sea experience (Exod. 15:1-21).

A clear call to worship is seen when God called for a meeting between Israel and Himself after he had brought them out of Egypt to Sinai (Exod. 24:1). At the foot of the mountain, the Israelites became the Assembly of God (Exod. 24:2-4). It seems that there was a full participation of the people in this worship (Exod. 24:5-7). This worship scene also depicts God speaking to His people which

indicate the proclamation of the Word of God in worship. The people then accepted the conditions of the covenant by pledging to obey the will of God (Exod. 24:7-8). Thus, true worship must lead the believer to the renewal of covenant or commitment.

Robert E. Webber elucidates, further, that a biblical worship that is engrained in an event, conveyed in a covenant characterized by a book, and ratified by sacrifice is to transpire at Specific places and times.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the Israelites were to observe the Sabbath, worshipping in it for generations to come as a lasting covenant. It was a permanent sign between God and the Jews, for in six days the Lord made the Heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day, He rested from all His works (Exod. 31:16-17).

Music, also, played an important role in the Israelites worship and their daily lives. Music and musical instruments were used in ancient Israel during feasts by Laban for a send-off party (Gen 31:27; Isa 24: 7-8; Luke 15: 25); coronations like that of King Solomon (1 Kgs 1:39-40; 2 Chron. 23:13); idolatrous celebrations (Exod. 32:18-19); public mourning (Ezek. 32:16; Matt. 9:23); by wanton women to seduce (Isa. 23:15; Prov. 7:7-21); and in relation to battles (Josh. 6:16; 2 Chron. 20:20-25).

Jewish tradition has it that “the use of certain ‘sigla’ in the copied texts of the Hebrew Bible suggests some commonly acknowledged musical notation, describing pitches and tones for singing.”<sup>11</sup> The musical tradition of the Old Testament, like other oriental nations, was melody rather than harmony which was unknown then. With this type of music, the old and young, men and women, singers and instruments, seem to have sung one part only in octaves.<sup>12</sup>

Around the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Palestine, a group of Jewish “composers and singers of new liturgical prayers and hymns for Sabbath and holy days” supports the fact that “the musical tradition of the Old Testament continued to progress.”<sup>13</sup> David, the second king of Israel, was the first to use music in religious ritual and in a professional manner. During his reign, he set the tribe of Levi as “the custodians of the music of the divine service.”<sup>14</sup> King David can be seen as a lover of music since 150 Psalms of the Book of Psalms which he wrote serves as the “bedrock of Judeo-Christian hymnology,” Irene Hesk, then, concludes that “no other poetry has been set to music more often in Western civilization”<sup>15</sup> than that of David. Singing and music frolicked a very meaningful role in Israelite worship.<sup>16</sup>

The Psalms offers the best examples of the use of music in worship in the Bible. They were performed through

<sup>5</sup> Afolarin O. Ojewole, “Music and Worship,” in *Africa: Biblical Musicians and Worship Response* (Berrien Springs, MI: Departmental of World Mission Andrews University, 2014), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Jr. Lockyer, *All The Music of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), accessed November 12, 2016, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history\\_of\\_music\\_in\\_the\\_biblical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_music_in_the_biblical).

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Jr. Lockyer, *All The Music of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), accessed November 12, 2016, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history\\_of\\_music\\_in\\_the\\_biblical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_music_in_the_biblical).

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<sup>8</sup> Theodore W. Burgh, *Listening to the Artifacts: Music and Culture in Ancient Palestine, 1*.

<sup>9</sup> Antiphonally-means a music that is sung with a call and response.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Gillirgham, *Psalms Through Two Centuries* (Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 63, 65.

<sup>12</sup> John Bowker, *The Complete Bible Handbook: An Illustrated Companion* (New York, NY: DK, 2001), 180.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>14</sup> Irene Hesk, *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions and Cultures* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Dictionary*, Revised (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 745.

chanting or in a recitative-style during Israelite worships and several specific ones accompanied the various national feasts and festivals held weekly, monthly and yearly to express the blessings and hopes of God's people.<sup>17</sup> In the Psalms is found some popularly-known non-biblical tunes such as "do not destroy" in Psalm 57-59, 75; Psalm 56 "the silent dove in distant lands;" Psalm 60 "*shushan eduth*" and Psalm 80 "lilies." The Psalmist adopted these secular tunes for singing and playing of the above songs in the Psalms.<sup>18</sup> This implies that using favorite tunes of older songs for new lyrics is a common practice of hymnology to date. In other words, what makes a song new may not be the tune but the lyrics.

In the Old Testament, references to music, praise, and singing are double than references to prayer and praying. The word of God places much emphasis on the importance of music in the life of those who seek to know God. In the life of the Ancient Hebrews, the tune was the principal part of music the indispensable purpose of instrumental music was to underlie a song thought, to make the sung word more easily understood.<sup>19</sup>

During worship, the Hebrews sung in unison with no harmony or counterpoint. At this period, the effectiveness of the music depended on the number of singers and the size of the participating orchestra. The orchestra functions at times as an instrumental interlude as depicted by the word *selah* which appears 74 times in 39 psalms.

### **Musicians, Musical Instruments and Worship in First and Second Chronicles**

The first and second books of Chronicles give a pictorial evidence of how musicians and musical instruments were used in worship in Israel. David's first organization of a form of a choir is seen when Israel was moving the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13:1-8 cf. 2 Sam. 6:5). Here, David and his singers worshiped God in singing and the playing of instruments: harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets. In moving the Ark for the second time from Obed-Edom's house to Jerusalem, David gave proper order by asking the Priests and Levites to sanctify themselves (1 Chron. 15:1-15). In verse 16, David is seen consulting with the leadership of Levites (Heman, Asaph, and Ethan) to appoint singers accompanied by instruments of music. Chenaniah was appointed as the instructor in charge of music.

When the various groups were organized and the specific musical instruments were given, David clothed himself with a robe of fine linen similar to that of the Levites (v. 27-29) and joyfully danced before the Lord (1 Chron. 16:1). King David appointed some Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord (v. 4). He again selected the Levites with in-depth knowledge of the instruments he assigned them to play. For instance, Asaph with cymbals from the genealogy of Gershonite and Heman with trumpets also from the genealogy of Kohathite (v. 6 cf. 6:31-48).

<sup>17</sup> Herbert, Jr. Lockyer, *All The Music of the Bible*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Gillirgham, *Psalms Through Two Centuries*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Gillirgham, *Psalms Through Two Centuries*, 7.

Musical instruments receives a lot of mentioning in the early part of the Old Testament, a little in the more recent, and not at all in the New Testament till in the Book of Revelation. As time goes by, instrumental music acquires language of their own separate from the spoken word therefore becoming self-sufficient.

In chapter 23, David reorganized the Levitical musicians by assigning four thousand Levites to praise the Lord with the musical instruments he provided (made) for that purpose. These musicians were to stand every morning and evening to thank and praise God and whenever the burnt offerings were presented on the Sabbaths and at New Moons, and at the appointed feasts. In the handing over notes from David to Solomon, he included the structure of the temple service; and how the Priests and Levites were to be divided (28:12-13, 20-21).

The historical records in 2 Chronicles 5:1-14 indicates that at the completion of the temple, Solomon brought in the things his father David had dedicated, the ark and the holy articles, into the temple. The Priests brought in the ark and placed it in the holiest place and when they withdrew, the Levites (singers) with 120 Priest-trumpeters sang with their musical instruments (vv. 11, 12). As the trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, they render praises and thanks to the Lord. David, on the day of dedication of the temple, was accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, harps, lyres and other musical instruments- in praise of the Lord, the temple "was filled with a cloud" of "glory" (vv. 12-14). Through music, the presence of the Lord was felt in the temple and His glory filled the temple. After David and Solomon had instituted the temple orchestra, 2 Chronicles make references to music and singing in other texts (2 Chron. 20:28; 29: 2). For instance, Jehoshaphat appointed singers to sing before the army of Judah in their fight against the coalition army of Ammon, Moab, and Edom. Jehoshaphat's battle orchestra included harps, lutes, and trumpets (2 Chron. 20:21-28).

A scan through the two books of Chronicles lists the following musical instruments: harps (*nebalim*; 9x, 2 Chron. 9:11), lyres (*kinnorot*; 8x, 1 Chron. 15:21), tambourines (*tuppim*; 1x, 1 Chron. 13:8), cymbals (*metsiltayim*; 8x, 1 Chron. 16:5), trumpets (*chatsotserot*; 11x), and horn (*shophar*; 1x, 1 Chron. 15: 28). All these instruments except the cymbals were already known before David's coronation.<sup>20</sup> Even before the flood, Jubal was considered as the father of all who played the harp and flute (Gen. 4:21). Joshua was also instructed to have seven priests with horns to go before the ark and march around the city of Jericho seven times (Josh. 6:4).

It is clear that Israel adopted some music and musical instruments from its surrounding nations for temple use. Only professionally trained and skilled Levites were employed in the singing ministry and they did their singing in the temple of the Lord day and night. It seems from the OT account that any musical instrument can be used in worship provided it is handled by dedicated and sanctified players

### **III. Music and Worship in the New Testament**

The New Testament (NT), unlike the OT, is not explicit about the use of musical instruments in worship.<sup>21</sup> This may be

<sup>20</sup> Daniel K. Bediako, "The Use of Musical Instruments in Worship: A Study of 1-2 Chronicles," in *Music and Worship in Africa Adventist Dialogue From Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Nwaomah Sampson, Osei-Bonsu Robert, and Onongha Kelvin O. (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission Andrews University, 2014), 21-2.

<sup>21</sup> The New Testament seems to concentrate more on lyrics than the use of musical instrument in worship.

due to these two factors; “a negative reaction to the pagan grandeur of Roman culture and the growing importance of synagogue worship which were primary places of Scripture reading and recitation rather than places of music.”<sup>22</sup> The NT Church relied considerably on liturgy and singing with no consideration to the use of musical instruments in worship. It seems that the NT church used many of the Jewish Psalms and songs of worship taken from the synagogue (James 5:13). They also wrote their own hymns and songs of worship under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The practice of hymnology was the NT style as seen in Mary’s Song though “not conscious evidently, on this occasion, of any special presence of the Holy Spirit, committed her beautiful thoughts into the hymn bearing her name (Luke 1:46-56).”<sup>23</sup> From the text, Mary was praising God from her heart without any musical accompaniment. In addition to these two factors is the fact that the NT music had elements of music from Hebrew, Hellenism, and cultures of the various parts of the Roman Empire.<sup>24</sup> The NT writers addressed their writings to the Gentile world. These gentiles inhabited different regions and provinces of the Roman Empire. Some of these new converts were maybe familiar with the synagogue way of worshipping (Acts 17:17), whilst others were may be extreme pagans (Acts 14:12). Therefore, the NT writers did not show any interest in the liturgical or ritual worship of the Jews, especially the rituals of temple worship.<sup>25</sup> In other words, they believed that music is composed in different ways by different people in different cultures for varied purpose and not solely for the praise of God.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that due to how musical instruments were used<sup>27</sup> in the NT era, it discouraged their usage in the temple or synagogue. Also, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans seems to have completely wiped out temple worship. This encouraged private worship as depicted by Paul, “The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets at their

<sup>22</sup> Susan Gillirgham, *Psalms Through Two Centuries*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Malencthon, Philip, *The Pulpit Commentary Luke Chapter 1*, AGE software, Digital Library Commentary (USA, 2002). The setting of Elizabeth and Mary’s encounter in Luke 1 does not indicate the presence of instrumentalists during the composition and singing of Mary’s hymn.

<sup>24</sup> A. Behera, “Songs and Hymns in The New Testament,” *Indian Journal of Theology* 31–40 (1998 1982): 66.

<sup>25</sup> A. Behera, “Songs and Hymns in The New Testament,” *Indian Journal of Theology* 31–40 (1998 1982), 62. The spread of Christianity after the ascension of Jesus Christ did not allow the Apostles to train musicians and instrumentalist for worship. Since they were mostly itinerant ministers, therefore their adoption of hymns in worship which was dynamic and cultural friendly. The NT speaks of music which was common to the Jewish people as well as the Hellenistic communities in and around Palestine

<sup>26</sup> J. Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Washington, DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Musical instruments were used in paganism and some social gatherings therefore taking away their sacredness.

house” (1 Cor. 16:19). This condition did not allow worshippers to use trained musicians and instrumentalists in their worship as David and Solomon did.

In Ephesians 5:19, believers are admonished to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to sing and make music from their heart to the Lord. The same admonition seems repeated in the Colossian church to which Paul writes, “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” (Col. 3:16). From these readings, Paul acknowledged the kinds of church music fit for the NT worship: psalms which are words of God usually from psalms put to music and also understood to be songs accompanied by an instrument.

In spite of this, the NT people knew about musical instruments. 1 Cor. 13:1 mentions that if a Christian can speak in the tongues of an angel but has no love, he is like a temple cymbal. The echoes of trumpets signaled the battle call (14:8). However, the book of Revelation gives an indication that these instruments are used in heaven in praising God (Rev. 5:8)

#### IV. Implications of Biblical Perspective of Music and Worship for Adventist Music and Worship

The Bible, as an authoritative source of Christian doctrines and practices, gives a clearer picture about music and worship. This section of the paper draws some lessons contemporary Adventist Church can glean from the biblical perspective of music and worship.

First and foremost, the importance and significance of music in worship is never underestimated by the Bible. In the OT, music played an instrumental role in Hebrew worship. Music was never left out in any of the worship services of the Hebrews. Likewise, in the NT, the worship services of the early Christians were not void of music. In the same vein, the Adventist Church cannot afford to underestimate the significance of music in worship. That is to mean that the Adventist Church should give music a due place in its worship services. The use of music should be given a conscious consideration in all worship services of the Church. When this is heeded to, the attitude of singing only a stanza of a hymn number because of lack of time would become a history

Secondly, the Bible is not against the use of musical instruments in worship. In the OT, the Hebrews made use of musical instruments in their worship services only that they were handled by skilled men. Whilst the NT is not against their use, musical instruments were less used in their worship services, perhaps to avoid them being a snare to those who were weak in faith, as musical instruments were highly patronized in paganism, for that matter had received a secular connotation in the minds of the people. This biblical perspective of the use of musical instruments in worship depicts contextualization. This the Adventist Church should imbed. Where the use of musical instruments would not be a snare to other people’s faith subject to the availability of trained and skillful players, their use in worship services should be encouraged. On the other hand, where the use of musical instruments in worship, even with the availability of skillful players, would be a snare to other people’s faith, it should be avoided. In other words, with respect to whether musical instruments can be use in the worship services of the

Adventist Church or not, should be subject to the context (place, culture and the time) one finds himself. This the leadership of the Church at the various level should be meticulously about.

Again, the NT recognizes the use of music in private worship as Mary sung in her heart. In other words, as the use of music is crucial in cooperate worship so it is in private worship. As the Adventist Church gives a conscious consideration to music in worship, the individual members of the Church should be encouraged and taught to employ music to worship in their private homes and to their daily lives. In this case, sacred music should be encouraged. When this is heeded to, it would reduce the individual church member's exposure and influence to secular music. Also, in the OT, the use of music in worship was handled by a qualified musician (s). This implies that the Adventist Church in all its use of music in worship services should be led and handled by a well-trained musician (s). In this case, anytime music is being used in any worship services of the Adventist Church, a musician or musicians should stand in front of the congregation and lead out the singing by ensuring that the right tune is used and that all stanzas of the hymn would be sang. When this is heeded to, the case where, sometimes, each member or a group of church members would be singing in his or their own tune would become a thing of the past.

Moreover, in the OT, emphasize was placed on the number of singers and the size of the participating orchestra. This is to suggest that attention was given to the training of more qualified musicians. This the Adventist Church cannot overlook. A conscious effort should be made to train the church members to sing, most importantly, new converts. Music workshops could be organized to educate the church members on music and its essence in worship and in one's private life.

Lastly, the Scripture depicts a well-ordered worship services. In both the OT and NT, worship is seen to be done in an organized manner. In the same vein, the Adventist Church should ensure order and decorum in all of its worship services. From the commencement to the closure of each worship service of the Adventist Church, any form of disorderliness and messiness should be avoided, both among the old and the young.

### Conclusion

The Bible appreciates the magnificence of music and its essence in worship. Whilst music can be used for entertainment purposes, its use in worship should be to glorify God, the Maker of the worshipper. The study observed that in both the OT and NT, no worship service was void of music. The Bible, thus, recognizes music as an essential element of worship. Also, it was seen that the Bible is not against the use of musical instruments in worship. In the OT, musical instruments were used in worship whilst the NT recognizes its existence, though it was limitedly used. Therefore, its use should be subject to the context one finds himself. Moreover, it was observed, in the study, that the NT recognizes the use of music in private worship, as Mary sang in her heart. Again, the study saw that in the OT, the use of music in worship were handled by a qualified musician (s). Moreover, in the OT, emphasize was placed on the number of singers and the size of the participating orchestra. Lastly, it was seen that the Scripture depicts a well-ordered worship services void

of messiness. These, the Adventist Church cannot afford to overlook.

Today, the church cannot underestimate the essence and power of music in a well-ordered cooperate and private worship services. But then, the choice of music should be spirit filled and soul uplifting. Through music, the singer and the listener should come to a better understanding of God

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