

Part II: on the question of instrumental accompaniment

In our introduction, we made the point that questioning the legitimacy of the use of instrumental accompaniment as part of corporate worship may at first seem unusual, but actually it is odd if people of reformed persuasion do not question its legitimacy. Some appropriate and not at all unusual questions then are: how does instrumental accompaniment conform to God's commands? How does it fit with His regulation of worship? How does it fit with the regulative principle? These questions and the pursuit of tested answers to them are par for the course for people who confess adherence to reformed theology (at least, if they are consistent).

1A. Evidence for the use of IA that does not work

It will open the way to the core of this discussion if we consider some typical ways that people defend the use of IA with some explanation as to why these are not sufficient to make the case. The following things from the OT seem to be the pathways most commonly traveled to reach the goal of biblical justification for IA: celebrations, the Psalms, and temple worship.

1B. Celebrations mistaken as guides for worship using musical instruments

1) Miriam after crossing the Red Sea

After the deliverance from the Egyptians, Moses and the people sang "The Song of Moses." Then Miriam sang while all the women took tambourines and danced: **Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.** ²¹ **And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea"** (Ex. 15.20-21). This use of musical accompaniment is celebratory. The worshipful singing to the Lord is neither tabernacle nor temple worship. If it were, and if we draw a straight line to new temple/NT worship, then dancing would be part of the regulation that we are required to incorporate into church worship.

2) David and the Ark of the Covenant

As the priests carried the Ark to Jerusalem, there was joyful celebration: ⁵ **And David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals** (2 Sam. 6.5). The celebration ended suddenly when God severely punished a priest for touching the Ark: ⁶ **And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.** ⁷ **And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God** (6.6-7). This made David angry, fearful, and hesitant to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (6.8-10). Eventually, he brought the Ark to Jerusalem (conforming to God's directives very carefully). Again, there is dancing with IA, at least with the use of a horn ¹⁴ **And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.** ¹⁵ **So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn** (2 Sam. 6.14-15). However, it is unlikely that the horn accompanied singing. Thus, it is clear that the sound of the horn was part of public celebration on the road to Jerusalem. There is no legitimate application to make here to old then new church worship.

3) Joash the boy king

The grandmother of Joash was an ungodly woman who opposed his appointment to kingship. When he became king she became aware of the fact by the singing with IA that she heard: ¹² **When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the LORD to the people.** ¹³ **And when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. And Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!"** (2 Chron. 23.12-13). This grandmother was soon put to death, but not in the house of the Lord; then the nation rejoiced (23.14-21). It is difficult to ground NT new temple worship in this account,

which is clearly a celebration of kingly coronation. By contrast, it shows the appropriateness, for example, of having **singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration** when a citizen assumes the office of president of the USA.

2B. Psalms mistaken as guides for worship using musical instruments

We seem to be on firmer ground when we appeal to the Psalms to find guidance for corporate worship. Accordingly, many rest their entire case for IA on the Psalms. Psalm 150 is an example text that is typical:

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! ² Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! ³ Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! ⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! ⁵ Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! ⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

What can we say to those who appeal to this Psalm and others like it? We have two comments: 1) the problem of proving too much, and 2) the reality of poetic/prophetic metaphor.

1C. Problem of proving too much

If we argue from Psalm 150 for the use of trumpets, lutes, harps, tambourines, strings, pipes, and cymbals for new temple worship, then we must include dancing and loud clashing cymbals.

[Q: what is the basis for the conclusion that all these things must be included in new temple (NT church) assemblies for worship, that they are not optional (cf. two steps here)?

1) This is a textual unit; the various activities must apply equally; we cannot pick and choose, 2) RP does not give us options and choices; we cannot leave anything in this unit out, under reasonable circumstances as a church grows]

On Ps. 144.9: to whom does this apply and how does it apply literally? [**Psalm 144:9 I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you**] That is, how do NT Israelites (the church) do this? How can all believers sing and play harps? If we appeal to this text, what requires that all believers do this? [*Appealing here is for support of God's command; RP*]

Do you see any problems with deriving new temple worship from Psalm 149.1-5? **Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! ² Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! ³ Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! ⁴ For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. ⁵ Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds.**

2C. The reality of poetic/prophetic metaphor

Consider the rest of 149.6-9 with this question: are their problems that we must solve if we are going to base church worship on this text? **³ Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! ...⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, ⁷ to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, ⁸ to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, ⁹ to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise the LORD!** This leads naturally to the next point.

[We definitely have to interpret along the lines of prophetic/poetic metaphor because this is an imprecatory Psalm that finds its ultimate fulfillment in the not yet of Christ's kingdom. During the now of His kingdom the peoples do not receive vengeance, punishments, chains, and fetters; instead they receive gospel proclamation to the ends of the earth until the end of the age]

It seems quite reasonable to conclude that Psalm 150 (in a way that is typical) lists musical instruments to teach all Israelites (not just musicians) to, as Calvin puts it, “forcibly... teach the children of God that they cannot apply themselves too diligently to the praises of God—as if he would enjoin them strenuously to bring to this service [of praise] all their powers, and devote themselves wholly to it... The Psalmist, therefore, in exhorting believers to pour forth all their joy in the praises of God, enumerates, one upon another, all the musical instruments which were then in use, and reminds them that they ought all to be consecrated to the worship of God” (320).

3B. Temple worship mistaken as a guide for worship using musical instruments

If we emphasize the shift from promise to fulfillment and the obvious discontinuity that emerges between old and new, how can we isolate the use of instruments in old temple worship and not apply discontinuity to it along with the other components of OT worship? For Calvin, Girardeau, and Williamson in a line from Calvin through Presbyterianism to the OPC those who reject IA take the entire package of old temple worship as type and shadow (cf. Calvin on 81.3; 92.1; on 71.22, he says, "To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery, unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving"). Williamson makes the point like this:

The conclusion to which we are driven is this: God has not commanded us to use musical instruments in New Testament worship. We have seen that God did not authorize (command) the use of musical instruments until the time of Moses (even if we consider the trumpets used in the tabernacle to be instruments of music). When they were authorized (commanded), they were clearly a part of the shadowy ceremonial system. And even in the Old Testament period, worship (except that which was performed by the priests and Levites at the temple in Jerusalem) was commonly offered without musical instruments. Worship in the ancient synagogue was always devoid of such. So was the worship of the early church. Never in the New Testament do we find mention of their use. What we do find is an abundance of teaching to the effect that the whole system of tabernacle and temple worship (shadowy and typical in nature) has been abolished. It follows, therefore, that the use of musical instruments is not authorized in the worship of the church today.

At the least, we have to view OT temple worship with IA as representative and typical in some meaningful way since only a handful of Israelites participated in the authorized singing with IA.

[What fact about singing and playing in OT temple worship is striking about the Levities that argues for typology? This activity was restricted to the priests only in representation]

Discussion Comments and Qs:

Next time: balancing discontinuity with continuity