

Praising God With Harps

One of the major themes of the Bible is that God's people are commanded to sing His praises. This can be found in a great many verses, especially in the Psalms:

Psalm 9:11: “Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.”

Psalm 47:6: “Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.”

Psalm 66:2: “Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.”

Psalm 68:32: “Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah:”

There are many more examples that I could give, but I think this point is well understood. The people of God are commanded to sing praises to God, and churches generally do exactly that. Sometimes the singing portion of the service is short and sometimes it's long, but I haven't attended many church services that didn't include singing praise to God.

One point that is far less understood is that the psalms also speak about praising God *with harps*. This is mentioned numerous times in the book of Psalms:

Psalm 33:2: “Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.”

Psalm 43:4: “Then will I go unto the altar of

God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God."

Psalm 49:4: "I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.

Psalm 57:8: "Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early."

Psalm 71:22: "I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel."

Psalm 81:2: "Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery."

Psalm 98:5: "Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm."

Psalm 147:7: "Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God."

Psalm 149:3: "Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp."

Psalm 150:3: "Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp."

Some people may think that this is just referring to a musical instrument that was common in the ancient world, and it's nothing more than the personal preference of the psalmist. However, the Bible also tells us that God is praised with the harp

by those who are in Heaven:

Revelation 5:8-9: “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Revelation 15:2-3: “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”

This brings up a significant point. In the psalms we find many examples of people using harps to praise God. We even find *commands* to praise God with the harp (such as Psalm 33:2 and 98:5). We know that God loves being praised with the harp because that's found repeatedly in His word – in both the Old and New Testaments. God even told us that those who are in His throne room in Heaven praise Him *with the harp*. This is clearly something that He loves.

Yet churches don't use harps to praise God! Even though this is something God wants, and something that's done in

Heaven, churches avoid harps. Churches have chosen to put a *lot* of effort into making music that attracts a crowd, instead of making music that God Himself said that He enjoys. I believe that churches are more concerned about drawing in a large crowd than making music that pleases God.

I realize that churches do use stringed instruments to praise God, such as guitars. It's also true that there's a general command in the Bible to praise God with "stringed instruments" (Psalm 150:4). The Bible even refers to an ancient stringed instrument called a "psaltery" which was *not* a harp. However, a harp is a specific musical instrument that has a specific sound. It's not at all the same thing as a guitar.

I'm not arguing that the harp is the only instrument that pleases God. The book of Psalms mentions other instruments as well, such as timbrels (Psalm 149:3) and trumpets (Psalm 150:3). The book of Psalms even mentions praising God with *dancing* (Psalm 149:3 and 150:4). There's also no command that says we're forbidden from using instruments that aren't mentioned in the Bible.

However, we do know that God loves the harp. We know that the saints in the past have used it to worship God. We know that God has commanded us to take the harp and praise Him with it. We know that the saints who are in Heaven praise God with the harp, and we know that God is praised with the harp in His throne room. That tells me the harp is an important instrument, and *churches shouldn't avoid using it*. I don't think churches need to use it exclusively, but if we'll one day use it to praise God in Heaven then we should definitely consider using it in this world as well.

If churches are opposed to using the harp – even though it's used in Heaven – then that brings up an important question. Are churches selecting music and instruments in order to please God, or to please their audiences? Is their worship aimed at God or at drawing a crowd? Who is the real target of their songs?