

Music and the Bible

David: The Sweet Psalmist of Israel

Introduction

- It is rare in area of study to find one person who completely changes their field in their lifetime, but David did just that when it comes to music in the Bible.
- David's impact is still felt today.

Music Before David

- David was clearly not the earliest songwriter.
 - Lamech might be the earliest, if it was a song - Genesis 4:23-24
 - Moses is the earliest Jewish songwriter we can identify - Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 90
- Most of the songs we have recorded before David are celebratory songs that praise God after military victories – Exodus 15, Judges 5, I Samuel 18:7, etc.
- Musical instruments are also rarely mentioned before David.
 - He may have invented some instruments – I Chronicles 23:5, Amos 6:5

David as a Musician

- David was skilled in the playing the harp, so much so that he was brought in to play before King Saul – I Samuel 16:14-23
- At least 75 of the Psalms were written by David
 - 73 are attributed to David in their titles.
 - Psalms 2 and 95 are credited to David in the New Testament (Acts 4:25, Hebrews 4:7).

David's Impact on Temple Worship

- David introduced music and singing into the worship at the Tabernacle in I Chronicles 16:41-42
- He organized the 4,000 Levite musicians – I Chronicles 23:5
 - Note - This large number likely did not play together except perhaps on the most important feast days. Likely smaller groups cycled through on a regular basis like the courses of the priests.
 - The three principal leaders were Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun/Ethan – I Chronicles 25:1
 - There were 288 master musicians that trained the others – I Chronicles 25:6-7
- The style of music in the Temple

- It is believed that the singing was unison – II Chronicles 5:13
- The instruments included: styles of harps/lyres, trumpets, pipes/flutes, and cymbals.
 - Instruments like trumpets and cymbals likely sounded at the end of lines or as musical signals.
- Alfred Edersheim describes the music this way:
 - “Properly speaking, the real service of praise in the Temple was only with the voice. This is often laid down as a principle by the Rabbis. What instrumental music there was, served only to accompany and sustain the song. Accordingly, none other than Levites might act as choristers, while other distinguished Israelites were allowed to take part in the instrumental music. The blasts of the trumpets, blown by priests only, formed—at least in the second Temple—no part of the instrumental music of the service, but were intended for quite different purposes”
 - “As in early Jewish poetry there was neither definite and continued metre (in the modern sense), nor regular and premeditated rhyme, so there was neither musical notation, nor yet any artificial harmony. The melody was simple, sweet, and sung in unison to the accompaniment of instrumental music. Only one pair of brass cymbals were allowed to be used. But this ‘sounding brass’ and ‘tinkling cymbal’ formed no part of the Temple music itself, and served only as the signal to begin that part of the service. To this the apostle seems to refer when, in 1 Corinthians 13:1, he compares the gift of ‘tongues’ to the sign or signal by which the real music of the Temple was introduced.”
 - “As already stated, the service of praise was mainly sustained by the human voice. A good voice was the one qualification needful for a Levite. In the second Temple female singers seem at one time to have been employed (Ezra 2:65; Neh 7:67). In the Temple of Herod their place was supplied by Levite boys. Nor did the worshippers any more take part in the praise, except by a responsive Amen. It was otherwise in the first Temple, as we gather from 1 Chronicles 16:36, from the allusion in Jeremiah 33:11, and also from such Psalms as 26:12; 68:26. At the laying of the foundation of the second Temple, and at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the singing seems to have been antiphonal, or in responses (Ezra 3:10, 11; Neh 12:27, 40), the two choirs afterwards apparently combining, and singing in unison in the Temple itself. Something of the same kind was probably also the practice in the first Temple. What the melodies were to which the Psalms had been sung, it is, unfortunately, now impossible to ascertain. Some of the music still used in the synagogue must date from those times, and there is no reason to doubt that in the so-called Gregorian tones we have also preserved to us a close approximation to the ancient hymnody of the Temple, though certainly not without considerable alterations.”
- Some psalms were song responsively/antiphonally, such as Psalm 136.