

Worshippers at War: The Church's Call to Praise on the Frontlines

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Spring 2023

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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**Abstract**

As spiritual warfare wages on and battles are constantly fought, the worship leader must understand the power of worship the Church wields in the love and strength of the Lord. In order for the role of the worship leader to be fully recognized and understood as a significant part of the body of Christ, its unique history must also be examined. It can be seen in the appointment of the Levites to the ministry of the Israelite tabernacle and their leadership on the battlefield. It can be found in first-century Christian leaders who persisted to praise the one true God even while facing persecution. It can be realized in the reformers who combated the unbiblical church practices of their day by putting God's Word into the hands of the people and putting forth forms of worship centered back on the Scriptures. As Christian churches expanded across the West, the role of the worship leader continued to hold precedence, even when liturgy, form, or style would change from one generation to the next. Even today, this position within the body of Christ exhorts the believers to worship God and glorify His name, and all the more as the days grow darker and the end draws nearer; not that the Church should function in fear, but rather in steadfast hope in a Sovereign who goes before and behind them in the trials of life.

## **Worshippers at War: The Church's Call to Praise on the Frontlines**

### **Worship Defined**

Spiritual warfare has wreaked havoc on the world since the devil fell from heaven, threatening to paralyze God's children with fear and doubt, leaving them utterly defenseless. But there is a mighty God who heads the church, loves the Church and will fight the battle for the Church—and some Christians don't even realize it. Therefore, believers must know who they worship, how they worship, and why they worship, knowing that the spiritual battles they fight can be won victoriously through the power of God, the work of Jesus Christ and the impetus of the Holy Spirit. Today, worship leaders fight on the frontlines of this epic spiritual war, marshalling the congregation to continuously praise the Lord with full confidence in their promised victory.

Within the very depths of human beings lies the desire to revere or adore something greater than themselves. Worship can refer to ascribing worth to some higher deity, one that significantly surpasses humankind in scope, intelligence, or power. Old Testament scholar Daniel Block points out that the English word *worship* contains two words: "worth" and ship"; when put together, "worship involves one person's recognition of another person's superior status or honor."<sup>1</sup> The devotion towards a philosophy, an ideal, a person, or place, or experience also showcases the worship of something. However, according to the evangelical Christian belief, there is only One who is worthy of worship. Jehovah is God and Lord over all, "worthy to receive glory and honor and power," for He "created all things," and "by His will they existed

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 8.

and were created.”<sup>2</sup> This kind of worship expressed by His followers, those who know and believe in Him, can be described as “Godward acknowledgement of His unsurpassable greatness.”<sup>3</sup> Christian worship is also “a matter of responding to God’s initiative in salvation and revelation, and doing so in the way that he requires.”<sup>4</sup>

When believers gather together every week in congregations across the globe, they come together to worship the Lord, to glean from the teaching of the scriptures and serve one another as members of one body under Christ. The worship service is time specifically allocated for the praise and adoration of God through songs, the scriptures, prayer, and numerous other forms and expressions. It is widely common for the music portion of a church service to be known as “the worship”; however, the worship of the Lord does not begin when the music portion of a service starts, nor does it end when the music ceases. Worship encompasses the entirety of the service. All the more, it should seep into every part of a believer’s life. As A.W. Tozer put it, “True worship of God must be a constant and consistent attitude or state of mind within the believer.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Worship War**

There has been an epic war raging on ever since Lucifer, a high-ranking angel, fell from heaven due to the desire to claim God’s throne as his own, taking a third of the angels with him. Genesis 3 tells of the Fall of Man when Lucifer, known as the devil or Satan, appeared to Adam

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. 4:11, *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 26.

<sup>4</sup> David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?: Including Worship: The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Wingspread Publishers, 2012), 23.

and Eve in the Garden of Eden, breathing lies about the words and character of God, deceiving them with thoughts of personal grandeur and gain, and tempting them to disobey God, which they did, causing sin to enter humanity and separate man from God for eternity. Since the Fall, the curse of sin has been passed down to each person resulting in the desire to obtain glory and worth for oneself, thereby forsaking the true worship of God. And Satan is still very much at work in a broken world full of broken individuals, opposing God at every turn. Theologians Brent Curtis and John Eldredge write of the character of Satan in this way: “His desire was, and still is, to possess everything that belongs to God, including the worship of all those whom God loves.”<sup>6</sup> If Satan is completely against God, then he will automatically be against those who worship God, who love God, and who call God Father. And so God’s people find themselves in the middle of this cosmic war, their worship being desired by two vastly opposing forces. This is why worship involves warfare: “Whenever we bow to worship God, the Adversary will oppose us.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The Present Spiritual Battle**

Until the Lord comes, the devil’s number one strategy is simply this: to rob God of as much worship as possible. The devil constantly schemes to distract the bride of Christ from offering true worship to God, casting his fiery darts into the very heart of the Church, working to create disunity within the body through the very acts that should bring God’s people together. And because of the brokenness of mankind and its sinful condition, the devil puts up a very

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<sup>6</sup> Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2007), 101.

<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2000), 145.

powerful fight. Both God and Satan demand worship from the Church, but in entirely different ways. Curtis and Eldredge write, “Something wonderful woos us. Something fearful stalks us.”<sup>8</sup> This fearful creature, so sly and provocative, eases his way into the lives of unsuspecting Christians in hopes of successfully dismantling the praises of God’s people. The wiles and schemes Satan uses are his voice, and “the voice of the devil is like a ‘sigh’—under it is something dangerous, something that feels adulterous and disloyal to the religion we are serving.”<sup>9</sup> Believers have learned of this threat over time through the scriptures and the Church and have produced a myriad of works discussing the enemy of God. Tertullian, a first-century Christian author from Carthage produced a work titled “The Chaplet, or De Corona” in which he wrote, “Let us take note of the devices of the devil, who is wont to ape some of God’s things with no other design than, by the faithfulness of his servants, to put us to shame, and to condemn us.”<sup>10</sup> Twentieth-century British writer C.S. Lewis wrote from the perspective of a demon in his satirical work *The Screwtape Letters* to depict a demon’s attempt to win over a man’s heart by leading him astray and away from God. Screwtape writes to his demon nephew and gives him advice on how to be successful in this fateful endeavor. One of his points states, “It’s funny how mortals always picture us at putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”<sup>11</sup> The enemy will do anything to distract the Church from the power, truth,

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<sup>8</sup> Curtis and Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Schaff, “Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III: The Chaplet, or De Corona.” Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, June 14, 2002, XV.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters; with, Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2001), 16.

and glory of God. War is waged with every choice one makes either to glorify God or rob Him of His glory, to the delight of the devil.

### **The Church's Defense in This Battle**

How can the Church defend herself against a clever, skillful, experienced and ruthless attacker? It is simple: praise God. The worship of God is the most important endeavor a follower of God has on this earth. It involves knowing God, loving God, believing God, obeying God and experiencing God. Worship involves the whole being and will affect the whole Church. When the body of Christ truly worships, they are brought into the presence of God with Jesus as their mediator and the Holy Spirit as their interceder. 1 Timothy 2:5 declares that “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” and Romans 8:27 articulates that “the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” The presence of God holds the greatest power and greatest protection, and the people of God access it when they praise. King David wrote of the power of praise in Psalm 27:6— “And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.” Thus, the worship of the Lord through endless praise provides a fervent defense against the spiritual forces of darkness: “The enemy’s ranks are broken and devastated by praise—their influence is neutralized, and their lies are exposed by praise.”<sup>12</sup> Even when a believer seems to have lost sight of God’s presence for but a moment, they don’t need to lose heart. Buddy Owens writes, “If you are looking for God and you just can’t seem to find him,

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<sup>12</sup> Jack R. Taylor, *The Hallelujah Factor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 33.

then stop what you are doing and worship him—and he will come find you.”<sup>13</sup> Everywhere across today’s church congregations, believers sing of this truth about God’s presence even in the war-torn areas of people’s lives. One such song lyric depicts the power of His presence in this way: “It may look like I’m surrounded, but I’m surrounded by You.”<sup>14</sup> Even King David wrote of God’s presence that protected him in times of trouble: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them”.<sup>15</sup> And when Screwtape mentioned God (who he refers to as the Enemy) while observing the man’s dealings with suffering, he states, “But even then, if he applies to Enemy headquarters, I have found that the post is nearly always defended.”<sup>16</sup> God will defend the believers; Satan knows this. Therefore, he will try to turn our attention towards other potential saviors/victors—all of which fall short compared to the victory that ultimately belongs and gives glory to God.

### ***How Physical Warfare Parallels Spiritual Warfare***

The spiritual war of the cosmos that so heavily involves the worship of believers draws some interesting parallels from physical warfare portrayed often in this world: “Both worship and war engage the extreme depth of the human soul: both call forth risk, confrontation, and sacrifice.”<sup>17</sup> Physical and spiritual warfare involve battles—a fight, a struggle between armed forces to resist or attain something. The Apostle knew of the spiritual battles taking place when

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<sup>13</sup> Buddy Owens, *The Way of a Worshiper: Discover the Secret to Friendship with God* (Lake Forest, CA: Purpose Driven Publishing, 2005), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Elyssa Smith, “Surrounded (Fight My Battles).” 2 on To The One (Live). 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Ps. 34:7, *ESV*.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Terry W. York, *America's Worship Wars* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), x.

he encouraged Timothy to “fight the good fight of the faith.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, James, the brother of Jesus, encouraged the dispersed believers to “resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”<sup>19</sup> Both spiritual and physical warfare require strategies—a plan of action and direction of movements in battle. It has already been discussed how the devil uses strategy to oppose God’s people, but God’s strategy upstages any and every plan ever made because of His sovereign and infinite will. King Solomon understood this when he wrote, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the Holy Spirit directs the movements of believers as He guides them into all truth. Both types of warfare involve conflict: there are opposing forces in the spiritual realm just as there always is in any earthly war. And just as an earthly army might advance against enemy soldiers, causing them to retreat, the Church advances forward when they praise the Lord, causing the devil and his servants to retreat. Moreover, both types of warfare involve surrender. Victorious believers and the enemy both display surrender, but for very different reasons. The enemy raises the white flag of surrender because God, the One who reigns victorious, has trampled them, rendering them defeated with no other choice but to capitulate. Believers on the other hand, raise the white flag of surrender to God as His children, acknowledging Him as their Lord who will go behind and before them, securing the victory in their present battles as well as the victory of their eternal future.

There is a tradition found in ancient warfare that also draws similarities to the harshness of the spiritual war in which the Church fights daily. When a king and his army defeated their enemies, they would commonly put to use what is known as *noncircumstantially dependent rites*:

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Tim. 6:12, *ESV*.

<sup>19</sup> Jas. 4:8, *ESV*.

<sup>20</sup> Prv. 19:21, *ESV*.

“harmful or salutary under all circumstances, resulting in either physical and/or psychological injury (for example, shame) or in some kind of gain for the patient.”<sup>21</sup> One such rite was the blinding of the defeated enemy. In 2 Kings 25:7, King Zedekiah, the king of Judah, was captured and blinded while bound in chains and taken to Babylon as Judah fell. Secondly, another rite was the uncovering of the enemy, or nakedness. In Isaiah 20, God describes the nakedness of Egypt and Cush as they are defeated by Assyria. Such public stripping represented defeat and utter humiliation upon the captives. Finally, the mutilation and/ or severing of the defeated enemy’s body part (s) served as a noncircumstantially dependent rite of war. In 1 Samuel 17:46, David demonstrated this rite by cutting off the head of the fallen giant Goliath. Just like in physical warfare, the enemy seeks to bring shame upon believers. If he can get born-again Christians to feel shame about their past or present sins, despite the promises of the Gospel, then he can hinder the true worship of God. There is no place for shame within the Gospel: the devil, however, intends for shame to penetrate the hearts of God’s people with any fiery dart he can muster.

### **Old Testament Worship**

#### **The Levites**

In the Old Testament, God appointed priests from the tribe of Levi to act as mediators between God and Israel, His chosen people, performing sacrifices on behalf of the people to cleanse them for their sins, making them right with God. God also appointed other Levites to minister to Himself and to Israel in the tabernacle, which prior to the building of the Temple under King Solomon was a movable sanctuary that acted as the meeting place for worship; the

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<sup>21</sup> Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 15-16.

tabernacle was where the presence of God resided. The whole congregation of Israel was led by God through the wilderness after being delivered out of slavery in Egypt towards the land of Canaan, and “whenever the camp of Israel moved, the procession was like that of a well-organized army, with the ark of God leading the way.”<sup>22</sup> These ministers of the tabernacle, from the tribe of Levi, were the same ones called to take up arms and engage in physical warfare. There was even an instance described in Exodus 32 where the Levites were called to take up the sword and kill about three thousand people because of the great sin Israel committed when they worshipped the golden calf instead of the God who delivered them from Egyptian bondage. Yet God called these ministers to be His warriors, carrying out His statutes for the whole encampment of Israel to see. Warren Wiersbe wrote of the Levites in this way, “Faithful ministry in the tabernacle was essential for victory on the battlefield,” and “The success of their warfare depended on the success of their worship.”<sup>23</sup>

The Levites weren’t appointed only to take up the sword; they were given the privilege to bless the congregation of Israel. In Numbers 6:22-27, the Lord commands Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel after the declaration of the Nazirite vow. Aaron (of the tribe of Levi) as Israel’s high priest, said to the people: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” This is a beautiful example of how worship leaders can offer blessings to their congregations today, all while showcasing the character of God.

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<sup>22</sup> Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 148.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Delving deeper into the Old Testament, the Levites held a major role in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah at the times of David, Solomon, and the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. One such instance involved the Levites leaving the Northern Kingdom for Jerusalem: “King Jeroboam ‘cast out’ the Levites and priests from their sacred offices” causing a migration towards Jerusalem of those who sought the Lord and wanted to sacrifice unto the Lord instead of “accepting the new religious reforms” of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> They served in the temple as teachers and musicians that encouraged the remembrance of God’s promises to His people: “The temple service and ministry of the Levite singers aimed to promote, foster and enable (not mechanistically maintain or achieve) the necessary conditions of the Davidic covenant.”<sup>25</sup> And in 2 Chronicles 7 when King Solomon dedicated the completed temple to the Lord, the priests and Levites stood at their posts and played their instruments, giving thanks to the Lord. In that same passage, in verse 14, God revealed to Solomon a powerful promise that worshipping believers can learn from today- “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Later on in the book, the Levites are given another special role within the kingdom of Judah: “Moreover, in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the Lord and to decide disputed cases.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Catriel Sugarman, “The Levites and the Levitical Choir.” *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 27 (05, 2006): 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Ming Him Ko, *The Levite Singers in Chronicles and Their Stabilising Role* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 6.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Chron. 19:8. *ESV*.

**2 Chronicles 20.** In the days of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, the Levites were appointed to lead Judah’s army on the frontlines against the attacking Moabites and Ammonites—not with any weapons, but with a worship song. They understood that it is the Lord who wages war as the people worship, proclaiming that it is God that is their strength, the One who will go before them and fight for them. Verse 17 shows the prophecy of Jahaziel, one of the Levites of the sons of Asaph, who through the Spirit of the Lord gave “A proclamation of holy war and exhortation to take courage.”<sup>27</sup> The idea of a *holy war* is what separated this particular battle from any other previously fought. All of Judah could believe through Jahaziel’s exhortation that “this earthly battle belongs to the heavenly realm of God.”<sup>28</sup> Even before Judah walked onto the battlefield, the Levites stood up after Jahaziel’s prophecy to praise the Lord with a loud voice (2 Chron. 20:19). This may seem like a spontaneous act of worship; true, it was led and guided by the Spirit of God, though Ming Him Ko, author of *The Levite Singers in Chronicles and their Stabilising Role*, would point out this act of worship leading came as “A result of planning and training.”<sup>29</sup> The Levites served with a plan and a purpose, even when leading the charge of a physical battle that perfectly parallels the spiritual battles the Church faces.

How was Judah victorious in 2 Chronicles 20? They didn’t fight the battle—God fought for them. Zac Hicks wrote of this concept in his book *The Worship Pastor*: “This battle is not

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<sup>27</sup> Ko, *The Levite Singers*, 177.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

waged by efforts of human action but by reception of divine action.”<sup>30</sup> This truth is the same when applied to the Gospel; salvation was not bought by human action, but rather received through the divine action of Jesus Christ. In the same way, the Israelites worshipped the Lord on the frontlines and received the divine action of God going before them and overthrowing their enemies. Exodus 14:14 is another example; when the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, they needed only to be still: God provided the divine action of parting the Red Sea and creating a pathway of deliverance for his people, and the Israelites received that action.

*The Levites.* In 2 Chronicles 30, the Passover was celebrated under King Hezekiah, and the Levites consecrated themselves and slaughtered the Passover lamb on behalf of the people. This led to a time of worship in verses 26-27: “So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.”

Here is another example of worship leaders blessing the people of God. Furthermore, their prayers on behalf of the people held immense weight since it reached God in heaven. The same is true when worship leaders pray over the saints today. Additionally, Levites were known as *scholar-singers*, a common profession among the Levites in ancient Judah, comprised of scribes, and officials and gatekeepers dedicated to the house and work of the Lord (2 Chron. 34:12-13). According to Ming Him Ko, the profession of scholar-singer was very unique in the

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<sup>30</sup> Zac M. Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 85.

congregation of Israel, for “...music, literacy and mastery of traditions were important elements for those considered elite. Music was a central part of learning, performing rituals, preserving traditions and contributing to liturgical performance.”<sup>31</sup>

These scholar-singers were also skilled in *scribal recontextualization*, “a given hymnic tradition that was framed in different literary contexts that were meaningful to different audiences.”<sup>32</sup>

Ezra 3 recounts the ministry of the Levites in the rebuilding of the temple after Ezra was permitted by King Artaxerxes to take Jewish exiles and return to Jerusalem. These ministers “played a vital role in the reconstruction and consolidation of the restored Judean community.”<sup>33</sup> Ko also makes an interesting note about Ezra, who was a priest and scribe: “Ezra was probably a scholar-singer; he was able to teach the Torah and compose hymnic traditions. He also led the Levitical musicians to sing praise during the dedication of the Jerusalem wall.”<sup>34</sup> Ezra wasn’t just a scribe and teacher—he was a worship leader. His devotion to the Lord is described perfectly in Ezra 7:10— “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” He was so devoted to God’s law that in Nehemiah 8, Ezra read the Law to the assembly of Jerusalem. In verse 9, the Levites encouraged the people to respond in reverence to God’s law: “This day is holy, do not be grieved.” Nehemiah 10 tells of the covenant made between God and the priests and Levites, with their names and obligations listed. More

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<sup>31</sup> Ko, *The Levite Singers*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> Sugarman, “The Levites and the Levitical Choir”, 7-8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ko, *The Levite Singers*, 96.

names are also listed in Nehemiah 12. Overall, the ministry of the Levites set a great example for today's church leaders, and not just their ministry within temple worship, but in spiritual warfare. Ko writes, "The apprenticeship of the Levite singers gave a realistic hope to the community. If the community persisted in seeking God and pursuing prophecy under David's directions, they could enjoy covenantal stability, even if they still encountered instability in reality."<sup>35</sup> Though the physical battle might loom and cause one to feel unstable, the Church can know Who remains victorious over their spiritual battles and can rest and be still in His presence.

*Worshipping on Holy Ground When Faced with the Battleground.* Holy ground refers to a place of worship in the presence of God. So, when believers praise God and sing about how He goes before and behind them, fighting for them and winning the victory over the enemy, they are always standing on holy ground! With that being said, such a holy space demands a proper response. What did Moses, Joshua, and Gideon do? They worshipped the Lord, the only one holy enough to be worthy of such praise and honor and to demand such praise and honor. In many cases, worshipping God on holy ground precedes the battleground, for the true worship of the Lord prepares the believer for such battles. With praises on their lips and weapons drawn for spiritual attack, their line of defense is now drawn up, and through the secure hold of the Victorious One, they can advance. These Old Testament examples display the significance of worshipping on holy ground preceding victory on the battleground.

Joshua worshipped the Commander of the Lord's Army—an Old Testament revealing of Jesus—before the Battle of Jericho in Joshua 5:13-15. Interestingly enough, the Commander spoke the same words God spoke to Moses from a burning bush in Exodus 3:5: "Take off your

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<sup>35</sup> Ko, *The Levite Singers*, 182.

sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy” (Jos. 5:15). This demonstrates that it is God who determines and declares where holy ground is; in fact, it is wherever the presence of the Lord is.

Moses worshipped God, the Great I Am, on holy ground before he led the Israelites out of Egypt in God’s miraculous deliverance. In the same way, Joshua worshipped on holy ground before Israel defeated Jericho in the Promised Land. Believers are fighting on a spiritual battleground all the time—but must never forget the holy ground. The Church’s offensive attack should be birthed out of the worship on holy ground in acknowledgment of the One who goes before and fights for his children.

There is another instance in Judges 7 that involves this type of worship expressed by Gideon, who along with just 300 men defeated a Midian army of thousands. Upon arriving at the enemy camp through God’s direction, Gideon overhears a man speak of his dream about God delivering them over to Gideon. When He overhears the man’s dream, Gideon worships the Lord. He praised God, knowing what He was already going to do—signifying another moment when the *battle belonged to God*.

Daniel 3 records the event in which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s image. Even in the furnace, these three men found themselves standing on holy ground, for there was another in the fire with them, one who was said to have looked like a “son of the gods” (Da. 3:25). This was Jesus in the Old Testament, the One who was truly worthy of worship, unlike the idol King Nebuchadnezzar erected of himself decreeing that all worship his own image. The three men’s holy ground experience occurred during their battleground trial. They didn’t know whether or not they would be delivered from the furnace, but they knew two things: God could deliver them

if He wanted to, and even if He didn't, He was still God, and still worthy of true worship (Da. 3:17-18). Even in the flames, the battle belonged to the Lord. And at the end of the account, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced God's from the fiery furnace, leading the pagan king to acknowledge the mighty hand of God and proclaim His works.

### **New Testament Worship**

All of the Old Testament points to a greater deliverance by the Warrior-King, the Messiah, who was prophesied to crush Satan's head and rescue God's people, ushering in the kingdom of heaven and establishing His Church filled with those who call upon and believe in Him.

### **The Work of Christ**

There is no better example of a worship leader than Jesus Himself. He loved the Father and cared about the things of the Father. He worshipped God through prayer, fasting, solitude, public declarations, and even through His death, burial, and resurrection. Though if Jesus is the ultimate worship leader, one might wonder why He didn't come from the tribe of Levi, the tribe that served as ministers in the tabernacle and temple, the Old Testament worship leaders. After all, Jesus came to the world as a Priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20), providing the holy sacrifice that atoned for the sins of the world. Instead, He came from the tribe of Judah. Judah's name means "praise."<sup>36</sup> So Jesus came from the line of praise and ultimately was the One who enabled every believer to praise. Moreover, the blessing of Judah given by Jacob in Genesis 49:8-10 describes that of a victor and ruler (Genesis 49:8-10). And it was true, the tribe of Judah pointed to the Victor, the Messiah, the Lion of Judah whose rule will never be

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *The Hallelujah Factor*, 112.

taken away or destroyed. The very essence of the tribe of Judah should be the very essence of believers who claim Jesus' name: Praise!

The Power in believer's praise is dependent upon the blood of Christ—that is the only way it can be authentic. Believers would know no victory if they were still indebted to their sin; thankfully, Jesus atoned for the sins of mankind by shedding His own perfect blood. The One who never sinned suffered as if He did in order that sinners could repent and be eternally freed from that debt—freeing them to worship God in spirit and truth, no longer bound by sin. And because it is the Gospel that saves and changes believers, worship leaders should choose songs saturated with it to sing corporately. It can be used as a powerful weapon of worship.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross for the atonement of man's sins and rose from the grave to defeat death's sting, Satan's defeat was sealed, knowing that in the end, God will receive all the glory and honor, and every knee will bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and his Church will live with Him forever. Wiersbe wrote of the striking contrast between the actions of Satan and Christ: "Lucifer exalted himself and was humiliated; Christ humbled himself and was highly exalted."<sup>37</sup>

### **The Early Church**

After the Spirit of the Lord came down upon the believers at Pentecost in Acts 2, revival swept across Jerusalem, resulting in the Church gathering together in worship and fellowship under the leadership of the Apostles. But one instance sparked a rise in the persecution of these Christians, causing them to disperse and move to other regions, spreading the Gospel as they went. This was the stoning of Stephen, found in Acts 7. While being stoned to death for

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<sup>37</sup> Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 146.

proclaiming the truth about God and Christ in front of the Sanhedrin, Stephen saw into heaven and beheld the glory of God and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God—he was on holy ground. Even in his death, Stephen saw the Lord and worshipped Him. He was focused upward and Godward—and set a powerful example to future persecuted Christians and today's worshipping believers. Even in Stephen's darkest and last hour, the battle belonged to God.

Saul of Tarsus, who approved of Stephen's execution, experienced holy ground when he encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus, and ultimately converted to Christianity. Known as Paul, he became known as one of the greatest missionaries ever to carry the Gospel to Gentile nations. In Acts 16:25-26 Paul and his comrade Silas find themselves in prison after healing a slave girl in Philippi, much to the chagrin of her masters. Though they were bound and shackled, Paul and Silas worshipped the Lord through prayer and the singing of hymns. They chose to praise God within the struggle, when it seemed like there was no way out. And indeed, God delivered them miraculously from their bondage.

Early Church Fathers, authors and thinkers produced great works exploring the importance of worship, liturgy, and the relationship believers have in Christ. One such pre-fourth-century author was Tertullian, widely considered as *the father of Latin Christianity*. "The Chaplet," was part of a collection of works from early Church fathers that provided insight regarding a Christian arrested for his beliefs. Tertullian writes to defend the Christian and encourage believers: "Be you, too, faithful unto death, and fight you, too, the good fight."<sup>38</sup>

As time went on, the emphasis on liturgy and church service form escalated with the high influence of the Roman Catholic church. Despite the deeply religious methods and places of

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<sup>38</sup> Schaff, "The Chaplet", XV.

prominence set by the church and the priests, spiritual darkness seemed to loom heavily upon the lives of believers. Truth was being exchanged for tradition, liturgy, and political power, where congregants lost personal interaction and knowledge of God's Word. Nicholas Wolterstorff defined *liturgy* as "the dialogue/discourse present in congregational worship—the sequence/order of act-types (elements of worship) such as the confessions of sins, intercessions, reading of Scripture, or music as a part of worship."<sup>39</sup> Church members could only confess their sins through a human priest who interceded for them. They could not read the Scriptures on their own, for they weren't written in their vernacular language, so they were obligated to solely rely on the priest's interpretation. The personal relationship and devotion of God seemed to be lost. But even in this spiritually war-torn time in church history, God used Christians to lead revivals, write hymns, translate the Scriptures into the language of the people and become catalysts that forever influenced the Church's future. Leaders such as Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) "emphasized congregational singing and wrote hymns and songs in the language of the people set to popular melodies."<sup>40</sup> One such revival was headed by Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) in Florence, Italy. This Italian preacher was well aware of the hypocrisy exhibited by religious leaders: "His soul was deeply troubled by sin, worldliness, and the vice he saw in the church."<sup>41</sup> He called for the church to come back to simple moral teachings and be set apart from the worldly culture promoted through the Renaissance. Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter wrote of

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<sup>39</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel, an Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music in Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 139.

<sup>41</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville, TN: B et H Academic, 2012), 85.

him in this way: “Savonarola seemed to be swept onward by a might not his own.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, God empowered him to preach truth in the face of lies. Though Savonarola was eventually martyred for his beliefs, reform continued to sweep across Europe in many different ways. In response to several heresies circulating within the church, Christians put forth various *creeds*, formal statements of Christian beliefs grounded in Scripture. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed are among the most well-known. Church leaders also wrote hymns as a way to teach believers biblical theology in opposition to the heresies simultaneously being taught. For example, the teachings of Bardesanes and Harmonius around A.D. 154 “used music to promote false theology”; as a response to such heretical writings, church leaders “took a more prominent role in the preparation and presentation of music and worship” partly to “control the spread of heretical hymns.”<sup>43</sup> The believers’ personal theology was being developed through the creation these creeds, hymns, and especially through the translation of the Bible into their own language. John Wycliffe (1328-1384) is known for being the first to translate the Latin Vulgate into vernacular English. The Latin Vulgate was a 4<sup>th</sup>-century Latin translation of the Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church, completed by the work of St. Jerome. But the common man in England didn’t read Latin. With the desire for the common man to know the Bible and follow its teachings rather than the teachings of the church clergymen, Wycliffe completed this translation in the late fourteenth century. As more Christian leaders arose and proclaimed that reforms should be made regarding the hypocrisy and tyranny of the Catholic church, the Protestant Reformation was well under way. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was a Swiss reformer known for

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<sup>42</sup> Elmer L. Towns, and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Ventura, CA: Vine Books, 2000), 186-87.

<sup>43</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship through the Ages*, 77-8.

establishing didactic worship in obedience to God through the ordinances of the Church, rather than what the Catholic church referred to as sacraments. Martin Luther (1483-1546) is widely known for posting the 95 Theses on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, which many believe to be the genesis of the Reformation. Luther rebuked church leaders for teaching that justification and salvation came through something other than grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He also was a firm believer in believer-priesthood, leading him to give the German people the Bible and the hymnbook in their own language. Zac Hicks makes a point about the reformers in this way: “The fundamental question that ignited the Protestant Reformation was this: How am I justified before God?”<sup>44</sup>

Within the seventeenth century, the idea of personal *piety*, or religious reverence, began in Germany by Lutheran theologian Philipp Jakob Spener. According to Towns and Whaley, “Pietists encouraged small-group Bible study and prayer groups and felt the chief goal in worship was edification of believers.”<sup>45</sup> It may seem like these believers were only focused on moral teachings and not the actual adoration of God. Nevertheless, the church leaders and reformers encouraged people to develop a personal relationship with Christ, not one that requires a privileged priest to mediate for them or was hindered by strict formality. Having the Scriptures in their own language could allow them to be personally instructed by the teachings of the Word, leading to the development of a personal theology which could in turn result in personal worship of God. Thus, the edification of believers would ultimately bring God the glory and stop the devil in his tracks. Even musicians understood this truth; J.S. Bach (1685-1750) was a prolific

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<sup>44</sup> Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 106.

German composer and pietist who wrote *Soli Deo Gloria* on his compositions signifying that the glory went to God alone. In short, “pietistic worship placed great emphasis on the transcendence of God and the need for repentance, conversion, assurance of salvation, and a personal relationship with Christ.”<sup>46</sup>

As more hymns were being authored by the Church, the use of Psalms became prominent within church liturgy. One such leader who promoted the Psalms was John Calvin (1509-1564), a Christian reformer in Geneva who helped create the Genevan Psalter used in the Genevan churches. Even in the Psalms, the worship of God is seen as a response to the victory God wins over His enemies and as a lifeline even in the midst of sorrows. Psalm 27:6 says, “And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.” Here King David uses the word *zamar* to denote singing and giving praise while playing an instrument. All throughout the Psalms David sang to the Lord in times of hardship and encouraged the use of instruments in worship. These Scriptures hold a profound place in church liturgy, having been mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Colossians when addressing the Church: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (3:16).

Throughout these reformations made in the Western Church, worship wars were certainly not a new concept. Leaders would disagree over different points in theology, liturgy, or how Scriptures were used in church services. One such example comes from John Smyth in seventeenth-century England, who followed the apostolic model of NT worship and was

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<sup>46</sup> William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 24-25.

criticized by Separatist leaders. He believed that “the three forms of worship authorized by scripture—praying, prophesying, and singing psalms—must be Spirit-led, not human-led, in order to qualify as ‘spiritual worship.’”<sup>47</sup> Different forms of worship/liturgy such as this one gave way to many disagreements in the past just like they do in the present; do churches sing the Psalms or recite the Psalms? Should the church services be thoroughly planned in advance or allow plentiful room for the Spirit to move? What part does Scripture and prophecy have within a church service? These were and still are legitimate questions from within the Church as believers seek to offer true worship to God and combat the devil’s schemes.

### **The Awakenings**

In this next section, Towns and Whaley discuss the several Awakenings that sparked revival across Europe and America, leading up to the twenty-first century church congregations that locally gather today in worship. The first of such revivals was the Great Awakening in Europe and America (1727-1790). In this period of time, hymnology upheld biblical theology whilst combating heresy:

Hymn writers strategically used hymns as a means for communicating theology and doctrine. For the first time, music was used as a tool for evangelism, as people began singing in public songs of personal experience—an important innovation to worship. Hymn writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were concerned with composing songs that expressed both doctrine and personal experience.<sup>48</sup>

Even in worship gatherings today, songs express the theology of the church and are the tools/weapons for driving out the wiles of the devil. The works of church leaders in those days

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<sup>47</sup> Kristian J. Pratt, “Worship Wars: John Smyth and the Apostolic Model of Spiritual Worship.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 49, no. 1 (2014): 29.

<sup>48</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 126.

included the hymns of the Wesley's (contributors to English hymnody, John collected and published Charles's hymns), Isaac Watts ("father of English hymnody"), who changed the course of English congregational singing through writing hymns on the glory and sovereignty of God, the security of election and the atonement,<sup>49</sup> and Benjamin Keach (composer and writer of Christian hymns).

The Camp Meeting Awakenings (1780-1820) sparked revival across America in response to great spiritual darkness that took over the newly established country. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, great spiritual warfare arose with secularism and deism as the forefront of the young nation's poor theology and lack of spiritual leadership. Though America was victorious in their physical warfare against Britain, they were living spiritually defeated. Deism was the main belief system that was based off of human reason rather than God's divine authority; it "denied the reality of God's intervention in the lives of people and rejected any notion of supernatural guidance or answers to prayer".<sup>50</sup> Presbyterian author J. Parnell McCarter wrote about the country's condition of this age in his book *Thy Kingdom Come: A Sketch of Christ's Church in Church History*. In chapter 62, McCarter writes:

America paid a price for its spiritual and moral decay. More than 15,000 of the 300,000 confirmed alcoholics in America died each year. Profanity was rampant, and women were afraid to go outdoors at night for fear of assault and rape. Bank robbery, fraud, infidelity, gambling, and licentiousness were commonplace.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnody* (Nashville, TN: Church Street Press, 1995), 134-36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>51</sup> J. Parnell McCarter, *Thy Kingdom Come: A Sketch of Christ's Church in Church History* (Jenison, MI: J. Parnell McCarter, 2004), <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/Thy%20Kingdom%20Come%2011/chapter62>; accessed March 29, 2023.

America was a nation with few true worshippers, so far down this apathetic and spiritually distant path that many church leaders and even politicians wondered if the Church could ever rise up out of this defeated state. But once again, God used church leaders to start prayer meetings and revival services to bring about spiritual change and restoration to this young nation. James McGready was one such leader who preached at Cane Ridge in 1801, leading to revival and beginning of other camp meetings to come. This Awakening in particular launched the significance of “public display of emotions” in worship and “demonstrated their love for God through bodily movement and vocal expression.”<sup>52</sup>

The Sunday School and Charles Finney Revivals (1820-1850) emerged in the wake of The War of 1812. Though the physical warfare the nation was experiencing could have distracted believers from the revivals already taking place, revivals did nothing but grow during the nineteenth century. Robert Raikes established Sunday schools for low-income and working children, teaching them the Scriptures and encouraging believers to remember and take care spiritually for the young and the youth. Charles Finney was an atheist convert who began preaching the Gospel in 1821. It was he who coined the phrase “altar call,”<sup>53</sup> the invitation usually given at the end of a church service where people could come down front, kneel down, and pray to receive salvation in response to the message given. His *Lectures on Revival* discussed revival and evangelism, perhaps even more than the worship of God.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

The Laymen's Prayer Revival (1857-1890) saw great victory over darkness in the nation. It began in New York City when Jeremiah Lamphier organized a prayer meeting in hopes of reaching the unreached. These prayer meetings continued to expand and sweep across the nation, unifying churches of different denominations through the power of prayer. Another prominent leader in this period was a Christian preacher named Dwight L. Moody, who organized Sunday School ministries in Chicago. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1871, The Great Chicago Fire destroyed Moody's church, disrupted his service and even claimed the lives of some members of his congregation. The enemy clearly meant this for evil in an attempt to hinder the work of God and Moody's ministry. But God meant it for good; revival fires were continued across the nation, and Moody's ministry only grew. He eventually preached the gospel throughout England with song evangelist Ira Sankey, referred to as the 'father of gospel music,'<sup>55</sup> thus bringing the message of the Gospel to many through evangelistic preaching.

The Azusa Street Revivals (1906-1908) have a similar experience with physical setbacks as Moody and the Chicago fire. William Joseph Seymour was a preacher in Los Angeles who led the Azusa Street revivals through speaking in tongues and preaching of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, leading to confession and healing. While these revivals were happening, Seymour would prophecy of coming judgment, and on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1906, the San Francisco Earthquake gave credibility to Seymour's prediction.<sup>56</sup> What the enemy meant for evil through 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and the devastating results left in its wake, God meant for good; the Azusa

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<sup>55</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 187.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

Revival birthed the Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations and sparked notable innovations of racial integration and impromptu services within churches.

The Revivalist and Great Evangelistic Campaigns (1890-1960) were led by figures such as Billy Sunday, a major league baseball player who became a believer and led many evangelical campaigns, partnered with musician Homer Rodeheaver who directed choirs and instruments that “encouraged public professions of faith during Sunday’s evangelistic invitations.”<sup>57</sup> Evangelistic preachers and song leaders such as Charles Alexander utilized choirs heavily during revival services; they would be “seated with the evangelists behind the pulpit and facing the congregation, not in a ‘divided chancel’ or in the balcony in the tradition of ‘worship centered’ churches.”<sup>58</sup> At the time of these evangelistic campaigns, more innovations in worship arose, most prominently seen in the area of gospel music. Thomas Dorsey, the “father of black gospel song,”<sup>59</sup> contributed to gospel music through blues/jazz influence—that which is still seen in gospel music and worship groups today. Also within this Awakening, The two World Wars ignited the increased spread of the Gospel through mass media and calls to prayer through radio programs, Youth for Christ movement and the Bible College movement.<sup>60</sup>

The Jesus Movement (1960s-1970s) was a revival started by former hippies who turned to Christianity and away from drugs and parties and other activities that characterized the hippie culture. Known as the “Jesus People,” these believers started a movement that escalated when

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<sup>57</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 242.

<sup>58</sup> Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 249.

<sup>59</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 252.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

Pastor Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, invited these “Jesus People” to attend his church, leading to many getting baptized. TIME magazine even featured Jesus on their cover in a 1971 article that described the Jesus People in this way: “Their lives revolve around the necessity for an intense personal relationship with that Jesus, and the belief that such a relationship should condition every human life. They act as if divine intervention guides their every movement and can be counted on to solve every problem.”<sup>61</sup> Songs of worship also changed with the influence of the Jesus Movement. For example, Maranatha! Music became a record label affiliated with Calvary Chapel,<sup>62</sup> and was influential in worship songs known/sung today as songs of personal devotion to the Lord. The Jesus Movement also pioneered “Contemporary Christian Music”<sup>63</sup> which would birth into an industry of CCM artists.

### **Today’s Worship Gatherings**

Today, church congregations still gather once a week or more to worship God, though many look vastly different from the gatherings in the days of the Early Church, or the Awakenings, or even the twentieth-century worship revival movements. But the significance of worship regarding the whole being of the believer has remained consistent over the course of time. Jack Hayford writes:

New Testament worship comprises a full array of expression. Biblical worship isn’t a one dimension activity. It involves a combination of reason, spiritual intuition, and

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<sup>61</sup> “The Alternative Jesus: Psychedelic Christ,” <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,905202-1,00.html>; accessed March 29, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 302.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

emotions...worship is neither an exercise of barren intellectualism or thoughtless emotion. Worship involves the total human being: spirit, mind, emotions, body.<sup>64</sup>

Here are some thoughts being considered regarding twenty-first century corporate worship gatherings:

- There is a yearning for gatherings that reflect culture and embraces diversity within the Church “In order for corporate worship to be biblical, it must be ethnically diverse and culturally relevant.”<sup>65</sup>
- Post-Modern worship is embraced by denominations such as the Emerging Church, who desires to reach others with more friendliness and meeting their social needs.<sup>66</sup>
- A charismatic renewal, reminiscent of when it first took hold as a movement through Azusa Street Revivals, emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in worship.
- Reformed worship “seeks to find a balance between ‘spectacle’ and ‘sentimentality.’ There is strong emphasis on proclaiming the wonders of God—his greatness or transcendence.”<sup>67</sup>
- There are liturgical influences in developing a central focus in worship through the Bible, the sacraments, and congregational participation.<sup>68</sup>

Some Christians are content to stay silent or put on a façade when it comes to corporate worship. Others adopt a sense of *emotionalism*, an unwarranted expression or display of emotion.

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<sup>64</sup> Jack Hayford, “Charismatic Worship,” in *Experience God in Worship* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2000), 145.

<sup>65</sup> Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 358.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

Songwriter and worship leader Mike Harland writes, “Hymns and songs that emotion have an important place in our worship. But a warning is needed here: ministries that only include songs of emotional expression can lead to services that foster emotionalism. Emotion in worship is good; emotionalism can actually hinder worship.”<sup>69</sup> Another worship leader, Greg Scheer, also commented, “Passion’s flames can only burn for so long without fuel, and it appears that some worshipers attempt to re-create ecstatic experiences week after week without receiving the biblical instruction needed to sustain faith’s fire.”<sup>70</sup> In this type of mindset, believers could become guilty of worshipping an emotional experience instead of God.

### **The Church on the Front Lines**

And so the Church finds herself on the frontlines. How will she be armed. First of all, worshipping in spirit and in truth is key in living victoriously. John 4:23-24 says, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Worshipping God in spirit and truth goes far beyond singing; it involves knowing God encountering God in every aspect of one’s life and believing that what He says will always be true and hold true. Praise is pure truth when it is founded upon God’s Word; truth about who God is, what He has done and why He is worthy of every praise and every victory. The attacks and lies of the devil, the father of lies, are weakened when truth is proclaimed.

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<sup>69</sup> Mike Harland, *Worship Essentials: Growing a Healthy Worship Ministry without Starting a War!* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2018), 51.

<sup>70</sup> Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 94.

Ephesians 6 deliberately makes known to believers the spiritual forces that are always at work around them and how they can be prepared for battle with the proper tools, though not tools provided by any physical armor. As Wiersbe puts it, “This satanic army opposes God and His people and can only be defeated by God-given spiritual means.”<sup>71</sup> So the first piece of armor listed is the belt of truth, the foundation that holds the rest of the armor together as the church engages in spiritual warfare. The rest include the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

### **The Role of The Worship Leader and the Congregation**

Every believer is a worshipper. Every believer is a soldier fighting in the Lord’s army for the kingdom of God and the cause of Christ. When a believer worships the Lord by the power and truth of the Gospel, they lead an assault on hell, the world, and the flesh. Artist Zach Neese put it well when he wrote, “Shouting warns the world that we have a King in our camp. It is the roar of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the victory call, and the call to war.”<sup>72</sup> Hell is assaulted because Jesus triumphed over Satan. The world is assaulted because all worldly power and goodness are inadequate compared to what Jesus accomplished for salvation. The flesh is assaulted because none of its works can ever save a person—it is grace through faith in Jesus that can. Still, having this Gospel-centered view of worship requires sacrifice. Believers must lay

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<sup>71</sup> Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 146.

<sup>72</sup> Zach Neese, *How to Worship a King: Prepare Your Heart. Prepare Your World, Prepare the Way* (Southlake, TX: Gateway Create Publishing, 2015), 90.

aside every sin that clings so closely and put off the desires of the flesh when engaging in true worship, not just corporately but personally.

The worship leader of the local congregations of believers has an incredibly important role: point people to God, teach about God, share God with others, and create “spaces for musicians to engage in transcendence or revelation.”<sup>73</sup> Of course, this can be fleshed out in several different ways. For one, worship leaders today have similar roles as the Levitical singers/ministers from the Old Testament. They promote the things of God; they foster communion with God and enable believers to sing and shout praise to God. They point to God, not to themselves. Worship leaders must be careful to whom they are directing attention, because as soon as the focus is off of God and onto themselves, God is robbed of worship and Satan has successfully distracted a worshipper from their chief end of glorifying God. Worship leaders also lead the charge of the saints against the forces of darkness, but they can’t do or facilitate any strategic attack in their own strength; it is their acknowledgement of God’s divine authority and power that strengthens the troops and wins the victory. Because of how important this role is in the local church, worship leaders should be careful about how they plan to use music, liturgy, Scripture, prayer, and other elements in the service. In regard to using music in worship, Laura Benjamins writes, “The musician addresses God, and God speaks to the musician, as mediated through music. Similarly, music is created and written in relationship to God, as mediated and performed by the musician.”<sup>74</sup> One can also say that “choosing songs for Sunday is like choosing

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<sup>73</sup> Laura Benjamins, “Musicking as Liturgical Speech Acts: An Examination of Contemporary Worship Music Practices.” *Studia Liturgica* 51, no. 2 (August 23, 2021): 148.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamins, “Musicking as Liturgical Speech Acts”, 153-54.

weapons for war”.<sup>75</sup> After having taken inventory of all that is available to wield as weapons of praise, then the worship leader proceeds to teach the congregation such songs, encouraging them to sing unto the Lord, teaching them about who He is and what he has done. The music might be excellently performed, but unless the truth of God and the Gospel is carried through the music to the believers when they worship, then the music mediated and performed by the musicians in the congregated assembly is really a waste of time. Discovering how to balance the elements of the worship service is no simple feat. A worship leader likewise holds quite the pastoral role in the local church and has been pastoral since the very beginning. Hicks notes that “in a sense, humanity’s central task was to pastor all of creations’ worship of God. The link between worship leading and pastoring is etched into the bedrock of creation.”<sup>76</sup> They help shepherd God’s flock under the teaching of the senior pastor while also teaching them truth through the songs they sing and the Scriptures and prayers they exhort. The worship leader is the vanguard of the army of God; just as the Levites stood before the army of Judah singing praises to God, so are worship leaders standing before the congregation, encouraging the body to follow their example, to worship on holy ground as they enter their spiritual battlegrounds. At the end of the day, if worship leaders could just be “passionate about worship and serving others” in every aspect of their life,<sup>77</sup> as well as being “powerful in faith, prayer, and love, and overcoming fear to take risks for Christ,”<sup>78</sup> then they are truly revolutionary.

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<sup>75</sup> Matt Boswell, Facebook post, January 16, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Derek Williams, *Worship Revolution: Building a Worship Ministry Focused on Compassion* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

### Conclusion

The Church's spiritual worship of God in his Presence is their greatest defense against the enemy, and it really doesn't mean through music! Spiritual worship is actually defined in another passage of Scripture from Paul's letter to the Romans. He writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1-2). It is total surrender and total sacrifice—the kind of holy life that ascribes the most worth to God, something that Satan wants to see decrease. But Satan holds no power against spiritual worship:

Our spiritual worship of God hinders Satan's work, defeats his plans, robs him of territory, and increases his hatred of God and God's people. So long as any local church doesn't worship God in the Spirit, Satan is happy to let them do anything they want to do; for he knows that all of our man-made programs, no matter how seemingly successful, can never storm the gates of hell and defeat his demonic armies.<sup>79</sup>

Believers can know that they can live victoriously! Especially on this side of the cross, and within this day of grace, the Church has been given new life in Christ and continues to be sustained by Christ daily. She is given everything she needs to dispel the darkness, scatter the fiery darts of the evil one and destroy the lies of the enemy that threaten to hinder God's kingdom work here on this earth. May God's people live victoriously, and not in a manner Curtis and Eldredge deliberately mention when they write, "Our souls were made to live in the Larger Story, but we have forgotten our part."<sup>80</sup> The Church should never forget the part they have in the Story; they are on the winning side! Through Christ, they hold the victory, and when they continue to praise the Lord, they will watch Him win the victory—every time.

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<sup>79</sup> Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Curtis and Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*, 94.

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