THE OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT FOR THE ROLE OF THE WORSHIP LEADING CHOIR

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THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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ABSTRACT

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God designed mankind to find fulfillment through worship of him in corporate praise and worship. Detailed plans for corporate worship are outlined in the Old Testament Pentateuch, Books of History and Kingdom Books, especially as related to guidelines for worship in the Tabernacle and Temple. Despite the many biblical examples of the importance of corporate singing and the use of choir in worship, many contemporary evangelical congregations are finding just reason to abandon the use of choirs in any strategic role in facilitating or leading of worship. Thus, establishing the need to discover, determine and articulate the biblical role choir has in serving the worshipping community. This study will examine the biblical precedent for the role choirs have in the Old Testament.

The primary focus of this study will endeavor to establish a biblical precedent for the use of choirs in a worship leading capacity by examining their strategic role in Tabernacle worship, Temple worship, and post-exilic worship. Perhaps the findings of this study will help provide pastors, worship leaders, church leadership, and church congregants a platform for building a theology for a choir’s role in the worship leading process.
DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ to whom all of this was made possible.

I give you all the glory and praise!
Acknowledgements

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

I would first like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for giving me the strength and determination to finish this incredible journey. It is only through His grace that I have been able to complete this doctoral program.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

This thesis will look at the biblical precedent of the strategic role of choir in leading and facilitating corporate worship. Scripture establishes precedent for various worship leading roles with choir for corporate worship. Since the beginning, ancient manuscripts document significant use of choir to facilitate congregational participation in corporate worship. The intent of this study is to identify these roles assigned to the choir and demonstrate how they might apply to today’s evangelical worship traditions.

Background of Topic

Corporate singing is first recorded in Exodus 15:1-21 after God leads the Hebrew people out of Egypt:

The song is a narrative of thanksgiving led by Moses and his sister Miriam after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and were delivered by God from the Egyptians. The presentation was both instrumental and vocal, involved both men and women, and was accompanied by expressive movement.¹

This kind of singing is celebratory in nature and is an act of worship to God. People express their hope, love, and appreciation to God for their salvation and redemption from the enemy.

With the establishment of the Old Testament Tabernacle, God provides process or pattern for The Hebrew Nation to follow when offering music in public worship. Music, and the role of the choir in worship, takes on a more immanent role in corporate worship settings as the application for the Mosaic Law is defined and a newly structured paradigm is established during the reign of King David.

Before the reign of David, choirs as “an official ensemble” are not required or used in Tabernacle worship. But, it is when David brings the ark of the covenant and places it under a tent in Jerusalem, that an ensemble of singers is secured to assist in the proclamation of worship celebration. Through the Levitical Guilds of Asaph, Heman, Ethan, and Jeduthun, a new, carefully designed plan for educating and training singers of worship begins to emerge:

The choir consisted of at least 12 male singers. They were required to be part of the tribe of Levi and complete a five-year training period in music and worship. These musicians were set apart for service, sanctified with a clean heart, and were between the ages of 35 and 50. They were paid for their services, provided housing, and treated like other religious workers.\(^2\)

These innovative plans are organized and implemented through King David. In the process, choral singing and its role in Hebrew worship begins to take shape. Organizationally, these very early practices serve as a precursor to worship traditions commonly recognized in the Temple at Jerusalem. So much so, that by the time Solomon is anointed as King of Israel, King David’s organizational plans for worship are fully implemented, complete with large choirs, orchestras and percussion ensembles.

Throughout the Old Testament, the precedent for choir is established for various purposes and size. David requires a minimum of twelve singers to perform hourly, throughout the day. Solomon’s choir is at least four thousand in membership at the dedication of “The Temple.” “Zerubbabel’s Temple choir consists of 200 singers (Ezra 2:65), and Nehemiah’s Temple choir includes 245 men and women (Neh. 7:67).”\(^3\) No matter the size, choirs leading song in the Tabernacle and Temple helped promote corporate worship and encourage congregational participation.

\(^2\) Ibid, 36.
\(^3\) Ibid
Problem Statement

Since 1998, there has been a steady decline in the use of choir in a leadership role in evangelical worship. Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle of Duke University School of Sociology suggest that during the twenty plus years since 1998, churches in America including choirs in their worship services declined from 72.3% to 57.2%. Dr. Leon Boss indicates in his 2011 Doctor of Ministry Thesis at Liberty University, *Church Choirs: An Examination of Relevancy in 21st Century American Churches*, that the decline in the use of choir for evangelical worship may be grouped into one of four categories: “1) Decline in overall church membership, 2) Availability of capable volunteers from the church membership, 3) Cost of maintaining a choir, and 4) The culture of the community.” As fascinating as Dr. Boss’ premise is in providing diagnostic rationale for relevancy of choir among evangelical churches, perhaps there are other, much broader reasons for realizing and understanding why this decline seems to be a trend in worship practice:

First, there seems to be a lack of biblical or theological understanding by local church pastors and worship leadership of the choir’s role in worship. It seems that pastoral leadership, worship practitioners and lay-leadership have lost sight of the biblical role for choir in worship. What seems to be lost is an understanding of the role that the choir assumes in worship. Simply put, one needs to ask the question, “What does the Bible say about choir?”

Second, the biblical mandate of choir “in the assembly” no longer serves as the guide for purposing choral groups in worship. Biblical examples of the role for choir in worship, need for


promoting unity in the congregation through choir, and contribution choral groups obviously provide in corporate singing are being set aside by local church leadership. Sometimes citing a change in leadership focus, shift in congregational demographic, lack of interest in participation in choir by congregants, or need to be “more relevant” to the times, local church leadership simply set aside the use of choir and give preference to smaller vocal ensembles accompanied by some type of “praise band.”

Third, more and more, colleges and universities boasting robust training in worship studies often pre-suppose their graduates serving in churches with little or no interest in developing opportunities for choir in worship. Graduates often finish their studies in worship with little experience in or preparation for leading choir. These young worship leaders are simply not equipped to successfully engage choir in meaningful leadership roles.

Whatever the justification in abandoning the use of choir in Evangelical worship, it is obvious that a study of the biblical role of choir in worship needs to be articulated. The question: “What is the biblical precedent for the worship leading choir?”

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this paper is to discover and investigate foundational, biblical precedent for the role of the worship leading choir in the Old Testament. This study includes an articulation of worship practices in the wilderness, at the Tabernacle, Temple, and during the post-exilic period of the Old Testament.

**Significance of Study**

The Old Testament choirs are seen as strategic to corporate worship during: 1) Tabernacle worship; 2) The transporting of the ark of the covenant from Kirjath Jearim to the
tent in Jerusalem; 3) King David’s appointment of leaders in the Tribe of Levi to significant roles in worship as “singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy” (1 Chron. 15:16 NKJV); 4) At the dedication of Solomon’s Temple; and 5) During the post-exilic period under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Significance of this study may be seen in the application of learned precedent to the role of choir in present-day worship practice; facilitating the teaching and admonishing aspect of congregational worship (Colossians 3:16); providing opportunity to demonstrate group participation in corporate worship; and, seeing “new model for choir-led congregational worship” replace the “old model for a performing choir.”

As the centuries, generations, and decades pass, the function of the choir may change, but its role remains the same.

The Methodology

To examine the precedent and strategic role choir has in corporate worship, a combination of biblical, historical and descriptive research techniques are utilized. This approach provides opportunity to assess viable precedent for using choir in strategic worship leading roles throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Descriptive research provides opportunity to examine biblical and historical literature for the purpose of establishing precedent for worship

6 “It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever,” that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud” (2 Chronicles 5:13)

7 Former worship pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Charles Billingsley says, “It may be that what is fading away is the “performance choir,” replaced by choirs that lead the whole congregation in song…. Their main function is to be an army of worship voices leading the people of God into the presence of God.” Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle. “Religious Congregations in 21st Century America.” Department of Sociology, Duke University, (November 2015): accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf.
leading choirs in Old Testament and investigate various biblical teachings, biblical examples and theological exhortation to support this notion in 21st Century worship.

**Statement of Limitations**

This study focuses on establishing biblical precedent for the role of choir in worship in the Old Testament. It does not include an investigation of choir in New Testament worship, The Revelation, early church, church history, or contemporary 21st Century worship leading process. Further, this study does not investigate the use of instruments or technology in worship.

**Structure and Organization**

Chapter One – is an introduction and overview of the study. This chapter includes the background and problems addressed, research purpose and significance, the methodology, a statement of limitations, structure and organization and definition of terms.

Chapter Two – is the literature reviews. Literature documentation is divided into three categories for research, including: biblical foundations, theological foundations, and general worship studies. Literature review includes investigative study of dissertations, thesis, formal journals, scholarly books, magazine articles, and historical publications.

Chapter Three – explores the biblical precedent for the worship leading choir in The Pentateuch, including worship in the wilderness, inception of Tabernacle worship, and the songs of Moses. This chapter examines songs from the Pentateuch that helps set the stage for choral music in corporate worship.

Chapter Four – examines the precedent of the worship leading choir from the reign of King David through Temple worship as implemented and practiced by King Solomon. This chapter examines how David organizes choral music at Kirjath Jearim, at Gibeon, and in
Jerusalem. Additionally, this chapter examines the biblical precedent for the worship leading choir in Temple worship liturgy, including: 1) The organization for choral music during the transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) The organization for choral music within the Tent, Tabernacle, and Temple; 3) Worship practices during the Temple dedication service by King Solomon; 4) Choral music practiced during Temple liturgy; and, 5) Strategic responsibilities for worship by the Levitical Guilds and monarch leadership.

Chapter Five – focuses on choral music in times of war and during the reign of the Judean kings as well as in worship during the post-exilic period with Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra reestabishes the Levitical choir at the dedication of the rebuilt Jerusalem wall by Nehemiah.

Chapter Six – is divided into five sections: 1) Overview of the Study; 2) Discoveries and Observations; 3) Recommendations; 4) Future Studies; and 5) Concluding Remarks.

**Definition of Terms**

What follows are significant terms, along with their definitions important to this study. This list is not extensive in nature. Rather, the list provides a sampling of terms germane to the character of:

*Antiphonal Singing* – The singing alternately of two choirs.⁸

*Circumambulation* – A ritual commonly attested in Antiquity in the dedication of cities and buildings. Its purpose was apparently to affirm or reaffirm the idea of enclosure around a sacred area.⁹

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Davidic Command – Instructions by David for Temple worship and choral music as he commanded in 1 Chronicles 23-26 and 28.\(^\text{10}\)

Intertestamental Period - 400-year period between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.\(^\text{11}\)

Levitical Choir – Singers from the tribe of Levi who were appointed to Temple worship.

Multigenerational Worship - Worship in which people of every age are understood to be equally important."\(^\text{12}\)

Songs of Ascents – Comes from the verb “to go up,” refers to either (1) the journey of the returning exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem in the last half of the sixth century B.C. or (2) the annual journey of pilgrims to Jerusalem at the agricultural festivals (Passover/Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles).\(^\text{13}\)

Tabernacle Worship – Portable sanctuary constructed by Moses as a place of worship for the Hebrew people while wandering in the wilderness as well as in the Promised Land of Israel before the construction of the Temple. Worship consisted of burnt sacrifices within the outer court while the ark of the covenant was stationed inside of the Tabernacle to reveal God’s holiness and presence with His people.

Temple Worship – The Temple replaces the Tabernacle as the place for Jewish worship. David creates the blueprints while Solomon builds the Temple and implements its worship.

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Worship consists of burnt sacrifices and the Levitical choir singing within the outer court while the ark of the covenant is stationed inside of the Temple.

*Worship Leading Choir* – A church choir whose intent is to not sing for the people, but rather with the people as they lead the church congregation into song of praise. Every member of the worship choir is not merely a singer, but also a worship leader.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter is organized into three sections, (1) Biblical Foundations Literature Review, (2) Theological Foundations Literature Review, and (3) General Worship Studies Literature Review.

Research Related to the Biblical Foundations for Worship

Research for this rational is focused on the biblical foundations for the worship leading choir, drawing from specific principles found in the Old Testament.

Biblical professor and scholar, Dr. Mark J. Boda writes a journal article on “The Use of Todot In Nehemiah XII,” in the *Vetus Testamentum*. The Hebrew word for choir is *todo* while multiple choirs is pronounced *todot*. The book of Nehemiah describes two choirs that sings in a processional at the dedication of the Jerusalem wall. These two choirs conclude the processional inside the Temple as they sing together from two different vantage points.

Authors, Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen writes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* that depicts rules and regulations for Tabernacle and Temple worship. In this book, they argue that King David coordinated two worship services at two different locations, which were in Jerusalem and Gibeon at the same exact time. As the burnt offerings and songs of praise were being administered in Gibeon, the trumpets and singers would coordinate with the trumpets and singers at the Tent in Jerusalem to play the same song at the same exact time.

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Martin J. Selmen writes in his biblical commentary, *2 Chronicles* about the kings who ruled in Israel and Judea. This book was specifically used to examine the life and reign of King Jehoshaphat and how he prevailed over the kings of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir by putting the Levitical choir and musicians at the frontlines of battle.

*Worship Through the Ages* by Elmer Towns and Vernon Whaley gives an overview of worship chronologically from the Old Testament through the twenty-first century. This book is used in particular to describe the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings as well as to define the least number of singers possible to be considered a choir.

In Robert Webber’s, *Worship Old and New*, he organizes his book into four main sections, which includes biblical foundations of worship, biblical theology of worship, a brief history of worship, and the practice of worship. He discusses how some Old and New Testament Scriptures could possibly have been songs that were sung in the early church and he also brings to light some good practical ideas on how to use choirs in present-day worship.

**Research Related to the Theological Precepts for Worship**

Research for this rational is focused on the theological foundations for the worship leading choir, drawing from specific principles found in the Old Testament.

Dr. Nissim Amzallag and Mikhal Avriel writes a scholarly article, “Psalm 122 as the Song Performed at the Ceremony of Dedication of the City Wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12, 27-43),” in the *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*. They argue that the two separate

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choirs described in Nehemiah 12 sang the same song of Psalm 122 at the same exact time while on opposite ends of the Jerusalem wall as they marched in a processional towards the Temple.

Dr. Hayyim Angel is a rabbi and national scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideals who teaches advanced Tanakh courses at Yeshiva University. He writes an article, “The Contrasting Leadership Roles of Ezra and Nehemiah”20 for Conversations Magazine. This article examines the life, trials, and accomplishments of Ezra and Nehemiah as the leaders of Jerusalem. This article documents the time period that Ezra and Nehemiah would have reestablished Temple worship including choral music as well as the rebuilding of the city wall.

Daniel Block, in his book For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship,21 writes a compelling book on worship from the Old and New Testaments. He utilizes two principles to help the reader recall God’s glory. First, true worship is a vertical exercise, the human response to the divine Creator and Redeemer. Second, he focuses on how authentic worship is primarily from Scripture.22 This book is being specifically used for his insight on music and singing from the inception of Jewish culture through Temple worship.

Dr. John W. Kleinig’s dissertation that was abbreviated into his book, Lord’s Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles,23 does an incredible job examining the institution, establishment, and organization of the priests and Levites, musical guilds, and sanctuary choirs in Jerusalem. The study focusses specifically on the books of First and Second Chronicles with the how and why the choral rite was established in Tabernacle and Temple worship and what those choirs looked like. The third chapter is dedicated to choral

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22 Ibid, 6.
singing in terms of its contents, location, times, instruments and performers. Many of his findings were documented in this research to help establish a biblical precedent for choirs.

In Dr. Gary Mathena’s doctoral thesis, *The Romanian Church Musician: Biblical Foundations for Training Musicians to Serve the Romanian Evangelical Church*, he writes on three biblical schools of worship: The Mosaic School of Worship, The Davidic School of Worship, and the Pauline School of Worship. His insight for the Mosaic and David school of music gives stable groundwork for the importance of music and worship in corporate worship.

Dr. Dennis T. Olson writes a scholarly article for *Theology Today*, titled, *God for Us, God Against Us: Singing the Pentateuch’s Songs of Praise in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32*. In this article, the author takes two of Moses’s most iconic songs, “The Song of The Sea” in Exodus 15 and “The Song of Moses” in Deuteronomy 32 and dissects it by comparing and contrasting its messages. Both songs describe the awesomeness of God while one foretells of Israel’s future failures. A number of theological indications concerning the praise of God flow out of the text between each song regarding the power of song and praise. Both songs are taught to the children of Israel in order for them to sing and remember the faithfulness of God.

In his book, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, Allen Ross sheds light on how much the Holy Scriptures tells its reader about worshipping God. Dividing the book into ten parts, each dealing with a phase of development, Ross outlines how God's plan for worship was progressively revealed just as His plan of salvation was revealed.

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Author, Catriel Sugarman writes a historically compelling article, “The Levites and the Levitical Choir,” for the *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*. This article is written on the history of the Levites, including the Levites from both the Old and New Testaments who were given important religious duties, which included singing. These Levites would sing for the daily religious ceremonies, religious holidays, and festivals.

Shaul Zalewski, Ph.D., writes his dissertation at the University of Melbourne, on “Cultic Officials in the Book of Chronicles.” In his dissertation, he argues that the priestly trumpeters and Levitical choirs served the same purpose in Tabernacle worship. Whenever the trumpets would play, the singers would sing along so that each member would proclaim, thank, and praise the Lord together. This also serves the same purpose as when the Levitical choir and trumpeters led the Judean army into battle with King Jehoshaphat.

**Research Related to General Worship Studies**

In his doctoral thesis, *Church Choirs: An Examination of Relevancy in 21st Century American Churches*, Dr. Leon Boss asks the question, “Are choirs needed?” The premise of his paper is to show through biblical, historical, and cultural evidence that the church choir is still relevant in the church today. His research provides four hypotheses of why people claim that the church choir is no longer relevant in modern day worship.

The *National Congregations Study* (NCS) is a survey known as the, *Religious Congregations in 21st Century America,* by Dr. Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle Ph.D. who

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studies at the Department of Sociology at Duke University. Both Chaves and Eagle surveys a representative sample of America's churches, synagogues, mosques and other local places of worship. The NCS is based on in-depth interviews and surveys with congregants and congregational leaders in 1998, 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19. It gathers information about worship, programs, staffing, community activities, demographics, and many other characteristics of American congregations. This study was used specifically to recognize the decline in the Evangelical church choir.

In 1921, Dr. Francis T. Forth writes an article, *What is Antiphonal Singing?* for *The Musical Times*. In his article, he defines the meaning for antiphonal singing before he dives into biblical examples and practices for this style of singing. His article gives its reader a better understanding for why this type of singing was popular in Temple worship and why it was still being used from time-to-time in his present-day worship services.

Bob Kauflin’s book, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* is the hymnbook and “instructional manual” for all worship leaders. Kauflin focuses on the responsibilities of all worship leaders to help lead the church congregation into a deeper encounter with God. This means that every worship leader, including choir members, must encounter God themselves privately before they are able to lead corporately. This book will challenge those to better understand what biblical worship is all about and how they can genuinely worship Him.

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Author, Dwayne Moore, writes a devotional study, *Pure Praise: A Heart-Focused Bible Study on Worship* based off of 2 Chronicles 20. In the midst of battle, King Jehoshaphat prays to God for help and deliverance. God listens to his prayer and responds through the unlikeliest of people. God delivers the Judean army out of the enemy’s hands because of the king’s faith in God. This devotional study helps its readers to better understand the importance of outward expressions of praise that can and should be used by choir members and church congregations alike, all over the world.

Dr. Frank Page and Lavon Gray, in their book, *Hungry for Worship: Challenges and Solutions for Today’s Church*, go deep into the issues that most churches and worship ministries face on a weekly basis. Some of these issues are idolatry, multigenerational and multicultural worship, performance-driven worship, technology, worship consumerism, and false theologies to just name a few. The authors dissect each issue and give biblical principles on how to point each circumstance to Christ.

Dr. Andrew Roby is an accomplished choral conductor, professor, and author who Writes the article, “Worshipful Singing: Four Roles of Song in Worship,” for *The Choral Journal*. Choir members and church congregations alike are called to worship and sing in corporate worship. Roby bases his article on four points, which are: (1) Singing in worship forms and expresses the faith of the worshipers, (2) Singing in worship embodies and expresses the essence of the faith community, (3) Singing in worship provides both a pathway toward and an

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expression of a connection between the human spirit and God, and (4) Singing in worship fosters a continued movement toward meaningful excellence as a response to God.  

Howard Vanderwell’s book, The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together, goes into the heart of multi-generational worship where it asks the tough questions such as: “Should we try to hold the generations together when we worship?” This book is made up of a compilation of writers and experts who reflect on the issues that church leaders need to address regarding multi-generational worship.

Dr. Vernon M. Whaley, dean of the School of Music at Liberty University, traces the development of worship theology from its inception at the creation of the universe in the book of Genesis all the way to the worship of God around the throne-room in the book of Revelation, in Called to Worship: From the Dawn of Creation to the Final Amen. This book provides insight for worship practices in the Pentateuch and the Judean monarch.

In his book, God Singers: A Guidebook for the Worship Leading Choir in the 21st Century, Dave Williamson main theme is how to develop choirs for present-day worship. He emphasizes the importance of transitioning the choir from a traditional approach to more of a worship leading choir. He defines the role and purpose of the choir as they engage the church congregation to participate and sing. Recommendations are given and concepts explored on how to begin a new choir or how to rework an old or established one.

36 Ibid, 60.
38 Ibid, 18.
Chapter 3
Old Testament Precedent – The Pentateuch

This chapter answers the question, “What biblical examples from the Old Testament Pentateuch establish a precedent for the role of the worship leading choir?” Research from the Old Testament Pentateuch focuses on establishing a biblical-theological rationale for the worship leading choir through the songs of Moses, Tabernacle worship practices and the Mosaic Law. Studies in this chapter are limited to the five Old Testament books known as the Pentateuch.

Introduction

Although the word choir or the use of choirs are never mentioned within the Pentateuch, there are several biblical examples throughout the five books that disclose a culture of music in the context of worship. Evidence indicates that large groups often gather together to memorize song lyric for the purpose of singing during the days of Moses. Many of these song lyrics are written by Moses and serve as a tool for remembering the wondrous miracle work God performs in the midst of the Israelite nation. Robert Webber calls this “The theme of remembering” and suggests this “anamnesis” is central to biblical worship.”41 Moses utilizes this “anamnesis” as a writing technique and method for promoting God’s laws, statutes and history through song.

This chapter examines four areas of worship practice within the pages of The Pentateuch:
1) Worship by Moses through Song; 2) Worship in the Tabernacle; 3) Other instructions for Worship; and, 4) Three choral Genre.

41 According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Anamnesis is a recalling to mind, or reminiscence. Anamnesis is often used as a narrative technique in fiction and poetry as well as in memoirs and autobiographies. In Christianity, anamnesis is a liturgical statement in which the Church refers to the memorial character of the Eucharist or to the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. It has its origin in Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "Do this in memory of me" (Greek: "τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν")
Worship by Moses Through Song

Moses composes and writes song throughout the forty years leading the children of Israel through the wilderness. Most lyric expresses praise to God for His mighty acts. Most often, these songs are sung before the Lord and in the Tabernacle. Moses enjoyed a deep, abiding relationship with God (Exodus 33:7-). Many of his song lyric recall this abiding friendship. This is most clearly evidenced in Numbers 12:6-8:

If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord.

God explains how His relationship with Moses is not like the relationships He has with past prophets. He may speak to His people in many different forms and methods, but God is clear that He speaks to Moses plainly. God even permits Moses to see His glory (Exod. 33:18-34:7).

Moses was a man of great faith. No doubt, this great faith played a significant role in Moses’ ability to author solid God-centered lyric. The author of the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews categorizes this faith:

24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. (Hebrews 11:24-29 NKJV)

The relationship between Moses and God was eighty years “in the make.” And, it was sustained by an intimate worship that apparently began at the burning bush on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3):
Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:10-12 NKJV).

The firsthand witnesses of Yahweh’s power over the false gods of Pharaoh and deliverance from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea prompt Moses to write love songs about the majesty and wonder of the Lord. The first song that is written after the destruction of the Egyptian army is “The Song of the Sea.”[^1] The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 initiates the children of Israel to sing together as one congregation of believers, but it also teaches about the faith and love Moses has for his God. The song is written into three different parts. The first section (15:1-12) praises God as a “Warrior”[^2] (15:3 NIV) who uses the waters of the Red Sea to drown and destroy the Egyptian army (15:4). There is striking imagery throughout this section of the song:

Verse 5 - The depths have covered them; They sank to the bottom like a stone.

Verse 6 - Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces.

Verse 8 - And with the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

Verse 10 - You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Verse 12 - You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them.

The defeat of the enemy reveals that there is no god like their God. “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus. 15:11 NKJV).

The second section (Exodus 15:13-18 NKJV) uses metaphors such as “Shepherd who guides and redeems” (15:13), and a “farmer who plants” (15:17) to describe God’s care for His people. The lyric speaks of God’s continued protection of Israel against Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan (15:14-15), the testimony of God’s mysterious works which speak fear into the heart of their enemy nations, and of God’s plan to establish Israel’s inheritance. Unique to this song by Moses is the prophetic rendering of a Temple (probably Solomon’s Temple) on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

In the mountain of Your inheritance,
In the place, O Lord,
which You have made For Your own dwelling,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established (Exodus 15:17 NKJV).

The third and final section of this song (Exodus 15:21 NKJV) is sung by Miriam, prophetess and sister of Aaron and Moses. Using as a theme Exodus 15:1, “I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously: The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!” Miriam takes the timbrel in hand and leads the women of Israel in song and a dance of worship to the Lord. Marc Rozelaar explains why Miriam’s Song of the Sea is significant and how it underscores Yahweh’s ability to fight and defeat Pharaoh’s army:

The inclusion of the separate women’s song immediately after the men singing in 15:1–18 underscores how the men of Israel have joined in and assumed the role of the women, singing the praises not of human soldiers but of YHWH.45

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Some biblical scholars suggest Miriam’s portion of The Song of the Sea being sung as an antiphonal response by the women and not as a solo,\(^{46}\) suggesting they echoed the refrain after each phrase or verse from The Song of the Sea sung by the men. This seems appropriate in that it allows opportunity for men and women to celebrate and sing together.\(^{47}\)

Over the next forty years, as Moses leads the children of Israel through the wilderness, God guides their steps, supplies their physical, spiritual, emotional and monetary needs. He provides a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night for protection and divine guidance. He provides food with manna and quail. And, during these many years, Moses’ love for Yahweh and commitment to a deepening relationship with “the God of the Ages” prompts the prophet to write songs of praise. In Numbers 21, for example, Moses writes “The Song of the Well”\(^{48}\) in response to God’s provision to supply water in the land of “Beer.” Together, they sing:

Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it. The well the leaders sank, Dug by the nation’s nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves. (Numbers. 21:17-18 NKJV).

Moses writes two songs of worship near the time of his “handing over the ministry mantel to Joshua.” Deuteronomy 27:12-26 outlines the song that every child of Israel is required to learn, memorize and sing in times of worship. The unique approach to biblical instruction through music provides opportunity for the teaching of rules for conduct, dangers of idolatry, sexual purity, value of the Word of God and expectations for worship in the new “promised land:”

\(^{14}\)“And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel: \(^{15}\)‘Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ “And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen!’ \(^{16}\)‘Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.’ “And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’

‘Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor’s landmark.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s bed.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them.’ ‘And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ (Deuteronomy 27:14-26 NKJV)

In Deuteronomy 32, Moses writes his final song, “The Anthem of the People of God,” also known as “The Song of Moses.” Moses comes with Joshua to all the families of Israel and sings this song in “the hearing of the people.” When finished sharing the lyric to all of Israel, Moses says:

Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess. (Deuteronomy 32:46-47 NKJV)

This song is prophetic in character, pedagogical in nature, articulates the consequences of sin, and proclaims the faithfulness of God. Beginning with the declaration to the heavens of Yahweh’s greatness, the song reassures the singer of the power of God to bring new life, “like drops of rain” on the grass:

**The Song of Moses**

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As raindrops on the tender herb, And as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His
work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.

5 “They have corrupted themselves; They are not His children, Because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation. 6 Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?

7 “Remember the days of old, Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; Your elders, and they will tell you: 8 When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel.

9 For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. 10 “He found him in a desert land And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. 11 As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, 12 So the Lord alone led him, And there was no foreign god with him. 13 “He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock; 14 Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.

15 “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. 16 They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger. 17 They sacrificed to demons, not to God, To gods they did not know, To new gods, new arrivals That your fathers did not fear.

18 Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, And have forgotten the God who fathered you. 19 “And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, Because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. 20 And He said: ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith.

21 They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation. 22 For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

23 ‘I will heap disasters on them; I will spend My arrows on them. 24 They shall be wasted with hunger, Devoured by pestilence and bitter destruction; I will also
send against them the teeth of beasts, With the poison of serpents of the dust.

25 The sword shall destroy outside; There shall be terror within For the young man and virgin, The nursing child with the man of gray hairs.

26 I would have said, “I will dash them in pieces, I will make the memory of them to cease from among men,” 27 Had I not feared the wrath of the enemy, Lest their adversaries should misunderstand, Lest they should say, “Our hand is high; And it is not the Lord who has done all this.” 28 “For they are a nation void of counsel, Nor is there any understanding in them.

29 Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would consider their latter end! 30 How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the Lord had surrendered them?

31 For their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves being judges. 32 For their vine is of the vine of Sodom And of the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of gall, Their clusters are bitter. 33 Their wine is the poison of serpents, And the cruel venom of cobras.

34 ‘Is this not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up among My treasures? 35 Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.’ 36 “For the Lord will judge His people And have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their power is gone, And there is no one remaining, bond or free. 37 He will say: ‘Where are their gods, The rock in which they sought refuge? 38 Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, And drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, And be your refuge.

39 ‘Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. 40 For I raise My hand to heaven, And say, “As I live forever, 41 If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, And repay those who hate Me. 42 I will make My arrows drunk with blood, And My sword shall devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the heads of the leaders of the enemy.” ’

43 “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people.”

The first song written by Moses, The Song of the Sea and his last song, The Song of Moses, conclude with the same general perspective. Moses is casting a forward shadow – to their future Promised Land. Although intentionally reassuring, the certainty of God’s protection in the
Promised Land, written about in Exodus 15, looks much different as Moses unpacks, through the use of metaphor, the multi-facet worship in Deuteronomy 32. In *The Song of the Sea*, the children of Israel are praising the Lord for “their confidence, divine guidance into His holy habitation, the land of rest where He will dwell among them and the reality of making them His inheritance.”

When looking at the total body of songs by Moses, praise for God, as the faithful warrior and great provider become the common theme:

That act of doxology, of singing and embodying the word of God’s victory over the oppressor, becomes in itself a nonviolent weapon, a verbal agent (like the watery agent of the sea) through which God continues to fight against the powers and principalities that threaten God’s people.

Moses’ intent for the future, as they come together to sing his songs, is that every generation will remember all that God has done for them as a nation, community and people group. Yahweh uses the Israelite people, their worship, their unique ethnic songs of worship and their leader, Moses, as a primary tool for giving testimony of the wonders of God to the ungodly nations surrounding this nomadic community.

**Worship in the Tabernacle**

Tabernacle worship begins at Mount Sinai when God reveals “The Ten Commandments” and “the Law” to Moses. God reveals his desire to dwell with His people:

Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle” I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord.

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their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God (Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46 NKJV).

Three observations from Scripture underscore God’s motive for dwelling with His creation: First, God values the importance of relationships. From the very beginning with Adam and Eve, God’s desire is to dwell among His people. Now that the children of Israel are free from the bondage of Egypt, He demonstrates His deep love for them as a nation and deep desire to commune with them personally.

Second, God confirms with the children of Israel His covenant with Abraham. He promises to be their God. This principle is re-enforced by God’s care for the Israelite nation, miracles on their behalf, guidance with a cloud by day and fire by night, and daily provisions for food and protection.

Third, God now establishes a pattern and place for worship in the Tabernacle. He gives Moses strategic instructions for building the Tabernacle, including its courtyard design, blueprint for construction, and rules for acceptable worship. God chooses to dwell within the walls of this Tabernacle and specifically in the ark of the covenant which is placed in the “most Holy place” (also known as the Holy of Holies). The High Priest from the Tribe of Levi may then approach God, offer sacrifices, and seek reconciliation on behalf of the people in this special space. This closely regulated process provides a pattern for the Children of Israel to worship for over 400 years (See Figure 1, below).

The Tabernacle itself is divided into three sections: the outer court; the inner court (also known as the Tent of Meeting or “The Holy Place”); and, the “Most Holy Place” (also known as “the Holy of Holies”). The Hebrew people as a nation may enter the outer court and those from

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the Tribe of Levi (or priests) may enter The Holy Place, and only the High Priest is allowed into
the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant resides (see Figure 1, below).\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{The Tabernacle}

\begin{center}
\textit{Figure 1 – The Tabernacle Within the Wilderness}\textsuperscript{54}
\end{center}

Within the three sections of the Tabernacle are its furnishings, each symbolizing an
aspect of God’s plan for redemption and worship. As one enters from the eastside of the outer
court, there is a high altar made of bronze used for burnt sacrifices (Exodus 27:1-8; 38:1-8).
Close to the altar is a bronze basin called, the laver, where the priests go through a process of
sanctification by the washing of their hands (Exodus 30:17-21). As one moves westward from

\textsuperscript{53} Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. “tabernacle,” 686-87.
\textsuperscript{54} Created by Justin McLaughlin, but adapted from “M. M. Ninan, Biblical & Apologetic Studies,”
http://www.talentshare.org/~mm9n/articles/man2/6.htm
the outer court into The Holy Place, there are two separate rooms. The first room is large with three furnishings: 1) on the north is a table made of gold called the “Showbread” (Exodus 25:23-30) where twelve loaves of bread are placed to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The table and the bread signify communion with God. Allen Ross, explains the purposes of this table and the use of Showbread:

The bread was a thank offering from the tribes, a grateful recognition of God’s provision of food; and on the other hand, the bread was a reminder of their dependence on God.\(^{55}\)

2) Across from the table is the golden lampstand with six branches, each holding seven lamps that burns olive oil. The branches and oil signify the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24). These lamps burn 24 hours a day and provide the only interior light for the Tabernacle tent.

3) On the far westside, directly in front of the veil that separates The Holy Place from the Most Holy Place stands the Altar of Incense (Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25-29). Ross writes:

The little altar was used for intercession: the priest would take some coals from the high altar and place them on this altar (the prayers were based on the sacrifices), sprinkle frankincense on them (the prayers would be pleasing to God), put blood on the tips of the horns of the altar (the prayers would be efficacious), and then, perhaps while seizing the horns, offer prayers to God for the people.\(^{56}\)

On the other side of the Altar of Incense is the curtain that separates the priests from the ark of the covenant. This is the Holy of Holies, a place of intercession by the High Priest.

God unpacks his pattern for Tabernacle worship – through the ark of the covenant, Tabernacle furnishings, Levitical priest’s garments, burnt offerings, sacrificial offerings, and festivals, including the location of the Tabernacle within the nomad community itself:

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\(^{55}\) Ross, 194.

\(^{56}\) Ibid
The Tabernacle was built in approximately 1440 BC and was the place where God dwelled with his people for 400 years… the Tabernacle was the center of the Israelite camp, with the twelve tribes camped around it in a special arrangement.\textsuperscript{57}

Although documentation of God’s law for the Israelite nation encompasses more than 50 chapters between the pages of Exodus 25 and the entire book of Leviticus, not much mention is made of guidelines for vocal or instrumental music within the Mosaic Law or Tabernacle worship. Exceptions are pragmatic in nature and apply to times and use of specific instruments in worship, as follows:

1) Exodus 28:33-35 provides instructions for the sewing of bells into the hem of priestly robes.

2) Leviticus 25:9 gives guidelines for the blowing of a shofar on the Day of Atonement.

3) Numbers 10:7-8 identify the blowing of trumpets as a sacred duty and for the purpose of gathering the assembly together.

   And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. \textsuperscript{8} The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations. (Numbers 10:7-8 NKJV).

4) Numbers 10:1-10; 29:1 and 31:6 articulate the blowing of trumpets to gather people for appointed feasts, over the burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord, signal breaking of camp, sound alarm for battle, and to mark the beginning of a new month.

   5) Numbers 31:6 set aside trumpets as “holy.”

\textbf{Other Instructions for Worship in the Pentateuch}

Additional areas in the Pentateuch speaking of music as related to acts of worship, include, but are not limited to: 1) A love song by Adam in Genesis 2:23 “This is now bone of my

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{57} Towns and Whaley,}
bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Dr. Gary Mathena, suggests “The tense of Adam’s lyric would indicate that he is directing this song toward God expressing gratitude for this long search for companion.”

2) Moses speaks of the creation of music in Genesis 4:21, referring to Jubal as “the father of all those who play the harp and flute.”

3) Genesis 31:27 implies singing and playing of instruments common to Hebrew worship.

4) Reference to song in worship in Exodus 32 are not to Yahweh but, to a golden calf with loud celebration, singing and dancing:

7 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ ” . . . 15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. 16 Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. 17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” 18 But he said: “It is not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, But the sound of singing I hear.” 19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses’ anger became hot . . . 20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it (Exodus 32:7-8,15-20 NKJV).

5) Deuteronomy 27:12-26 gives evidence of Moses giving instructions for a song to be sung by six Israeli tribes standing on Mount Gerizim while the remaining six tribes stand on Mount Ebal. Unique to this experience is that those on Mount Gerizim sing about the Lord’s blessings and those on Mount Ebal singing about God’s curses:

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And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, 12 “These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; 13 and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

6) The last recorded song in the Pentateuch is the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1-43. The Lord gives Moses a new song and instructs him to write it down, memorize the words and then teach both lyric and melody to the children of Israel. The song lyric contrasts the faithfulness of God to the consequences of practicing idolatry, inter-marriage with the surrounding Gentile nations and general disregard for the Laws of Yahweh. Daniel Block suggests this lyric is intended to serve as Israel’s national anthem.”

This song reminds the Israelite people that if they follow God’s Law, Yahweh will guide their every step, protect their nation from all evil and grant to them long life.

44 So Moses came with Joshua the son of Nun and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people. 45 Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel, 46 and he said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. 47 For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess. (Deuteronomy 32:44-47)

Three Choral Genre

Throughout the course of these Mosaic songs, three different styles of music sung by Hebrew choir emerge:

1) The antiphonal choir, which is “alternate singing by two choirs or singers.” The Song of The Sea in Exodus 15 reveals Moses and Miriam as the worship leaders while the men and women of Israel are the two separate choirs. The song form breaks into four strophes or stanzas

59 Block, 226.
(Exodus 15: 2-5, 6-10, 11-13, and 14-17 with Exodus 15:1, 21). Dr. Marc Rozelaar suggests the following:

It may be supposed that the "I" of the prologue and of the first strophe-probably represented by a singer from the temple-sang, by the side of v.1b), the hymnic verses 2 and 3, and, owing to the symmetrical structure of the song, also the corresponding part of the third strophe, viz. v.11). One may imagine that after the opening by the individual person, one half of the choir interpreted v. 4 and 5- in which, just as in their pendant sung by the same singers, v. 1 and 13, the concrete historical reason for the song was described-, whereupon the other half of the choir sang the grand elaboration of the datum, as written down in the second and fourth strophe (v. 6-10 and 14-17), and finally the whole choir joined the "soloist" in the jubilation of the epilogue, v.18. 61

In this scenario, a soloist begins the song at Exodus 15:1b and sings through verse three before the first choir joins in and sings the fourth and fifth verses. This is considered the first strophe. The second choir comes in and sings on their own in verses six through ten, which is considered the second strophe. The first choir returns and sings the third strophe, which is verses eleven through thirteen while the second choir sings the fourth strophe, verses fourteen through seventeen. Finally, both choir’s join in together to sing Exodus 15:18.

2) The Chanting Choir is recorded in Numbers 21:17-18: “The elders call the people together by chanting a promise: “Gather the people together and I will give them water. Then the people sing a work chant.” 62

3) In Deuteronomy 27:12-26, songs are written in call and response form and as a series of petitions or praises in worship, recited or sung by those leading the services with congregational response.” 63

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61 Rozelaar, 221-28.
63 Block, 259.
In this litany, the worship leading Levites sing each curse and the children of Israel responds with an “Amen!” Dr. Gary Mathena believes this litany is being used pedagogically to teach people about the blessings and curses of the Lord before moving into the Promised Land.

Conclusion

Biblical precedent for the worshiping choir is established in the Pentateuch in three major ways:

First, is the use of “anamnesis” as a method for memorizing song lyrics, but more importantly, for remembering God’s laws, statutes, and history. It is through these songs of Moses that the Hebrew people remember the Lord, their God.

Second, song lyrics give worshipers the opportunity to sing together, unified as one corporate body. This is seen through each song that the children of Israel are taught as they are instructed to sing together as an act of worship.

Third, the worshiping choir is invited to sing multiple styles and genres of music that share the same message of God’s love, faithfulness, provision, and deliverance from one’s enemies.

In short, this chapter emphasizes Moses’ song writing practices, leadership in the congregation, rules for Tabernacle celebration, the establishment of “the Law” and various acts of worship. Three different song forms are discussed: the antiphonal, the chant, and the call and response. Each genre provides a model for worship practice in the Tabernacle.

In the next chapter, King David establishes choral music as the new model within the constraints of Temple worship. In the process, he fulfills the rules and regulations set forth by the

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64 Mathena, 42.
Mosaic Law regarding music in worship. Several factors for the musical plan of worship, such as choral implementation, organization, and its leadership are examined.
Chapter 4
Old Testament Precedent: David and Solomon

This chapter outlines King David’s organizational plan for worship. King Solomon’s presentation of worship at the Temple Dedication in Jerusalem, and the Hebrew use of choir in worship. In particular, the chapter provides documentation of the biblical precedent for choirs in Tabernacle and Temple worship, including: 1) The organization for choral music during the transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) The organization for choral music within the Tent, Tabernacle, and Temple; 3) Worship practices during the Temple dedication service by King Solomon; 4) Choral music practiced during Temple liturgy; and, 5) Strategic responsibilities for worship by the Levitical Guilds and monarch leadership.

Music in worship had a strategic role within the Jewish culture from before and during the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph; during the years before and after their Wilderness with Moses and Joshua; during the time of “The Judges;” as part of the first monarch, King Saul; and, with the rule of King David.

The Hebrew nation, as a people group, “celebrated in the vineyards (Judg. 21:19-21), after sheep were shorn (2 Sam. 13:28), at weddings (Judg. 14:14), at coronations (1 Kings 1:39-40), and on pilgrimages (2 Sam. 6:5).”65 Music was also used to rally military troops (Josh. 6:3-16; Judg. 3:27), celebrate military victories (1 Sam. 18:7), and to mourn or lament the death of loved ones (2 Sam. 1:17-27).

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King David and His Plan for Worship

King David is instructed by God, through his prophet and seer, to include music as an act of worship. In 2 Chronicles 29:25, King Hezekiah:

Stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets (2 Chronicles 29:25).

Confirmation of God’s approval comes at the consecration of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 5.

In his book, *Lord’s Song*, author and professor, John Kleinig suggest that choral music is implied through the method for performance and liturgical rite:

The Chronicler presents a theological rationale for the choral rite based on an exegesis of selected passages from the Pentateuch. These passages do not, however, explicitly mention choral music, but rather give certain divine directions which, according to the Chronicler, were properly implemented by the performance of sacred song in the sacrificial ritual.  

Kleinig references two passages to support his thesis. The first passage is Deuteronomy 10:8.  

The priestly responsibility is divided into three areas:

First, the Levites are responsible for the transportation of the ark. (1 Chronicles 13:7-10).

Second, the Levites are to “stand before the Lord to minister to Him.” They are responsible for all the worship liturgy, which includes the burnt sacrifices as well as the transportation of the ark. They are commanded to minister *before the Lord “in” His name and to the people with music and songs of praise* (1 Chronicles 6:32):

“They were ministering with music before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.”

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67 Deuteronomy 10:8: At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to 1) bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, 2) to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and 3) to bless in His name.
Third, the Levites are to “bless in His name.” Kleinig suggests that in 1 Chronicles 15:2 David establishes choral singing as a direct fulfillment of Deuteronomy 10:8; to minister to the Lord by blessing His name through song.

The ministry which the Levites perform before the Lord is further detailed in 1 Chronicles 16: 1) the Levites are to minister regularly to the Lord before the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 16:4, 37); 2) at the Tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39-40; 6:32); 3) by “proclaiming, thanking and praising Him [Yahweh]” (1 Chronicles 16:4; 2 Chronicles 8:14; 31:2); and, 4) God’s name is announced and proclaimed through word of mouth by the Levites and as God instructed Moses to do in Exodus 3:14-15. Kleinig observes:

“While liturgical song was not explicitly instituted in the Pentateuch, it was held to be included in the commission of the Levites by the LORD to minister in His name.” 68

The second passage Kleinig uses to support choral music in the Tabernacle is Numbers 10:10:

Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the Lord your God.

This verse comes at the conclusion of the Lord’s declaration to Israel on the proper use of trumpets. According to Numbers 10:1-10, the trumpets are used for four main purposes:

First, to assemble the Israelites and its leaders for meeting.

Second, as a direct call for the movement of the camp location (vss. 2-8).

Third, for battle when they are at war against their enemies (vs 9)

68 Ibid
Fourth, over the burnt and peace offerings as a *memorial to God* (vs. 10). This word, “memorial,” is most often translated as “remembrance.”  

“[This] would mean that God will remember the people and honor the offering, but it is also possible that the phrase suggests that the people will remember God’s faithfulness.”

In context, every time the priests offer burnt offerings to the Lord, the trumpeters are to blow the trumpets. When they do this act, in obedience to the Lord’s command, the Lord promises to remember His people and the Israelites remember the Lord is *their* God.

King David is aware of the significance and proper use of trumpets in worship and warfare. He restructures liturgical protocol by adding choral music, with the playing of trumpets, to Tabernacle and Temple worship.

In 1 Chronicles 16:4 and 6, King David instructs the Levitical choir to “proclaim, thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel. Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests [are] to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God.”

Dr. Shaul Zalewski argues that the Chronicler articulates the duties for the choir in thanking and praising the Lord with the priests who are responsible for the blowing of the trumpets. This is a collaborative effort in that the priestly trumpeters and Levitical choir lead the music together.

Of primary purpose for the Temple choir, and in accordance with instructions by Moses in Numbers 10:10 and Deuteronomy 10:8, is the task of proclaiming truth. Thus, David’s use of choir and trumpet are strategic. First, the trumpets are most readily identified with ceremonial

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cleansing, burnt sacrifices, and work centered around the Ark of the Covenant. Second, choir provides opportunity to verbally proclaim the name of the Lord. Kleinig affirms this position:

“The whole temple choir, which consisted of priestly trumpeters and Levitical musicians, thus announced the LORD and proclaimed his presence.”

**King David and His Organization for Worship – Their Function**

Organizing choral music into Tabernacle and Temple worship is a desire that God puts into the heart of David. Choral music is organized into three stages: 1) The transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) Worship at the Tabernacle in both Gibeon and Jerusalem; and 3) Temple worship.

In the first stage, David orders the heads of the Levitical families to appoint an orchestra and choir to accompany the transportation of the ark of the covenant to its Tent in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:16-24). King David gathers thirty thousand chosen men of Israel (2 Samuel 6), and travels to Kirjath Jearim to the house of Abinadab to retrieve the ark; as it has not been stationed in the Tabernacle since it was stolen by the Philistines in battle during the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 4:11). Once David and the thirty thousand men arrive in Kirjath Jearim, the ark is placed on a new cart, which is pulled by oxen and driven by both of Abinadabs’ sons, Uzza and Ahio. According to 1 Chronicles 13:8,

> “David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets.”

In short order, David creates a worshipful parade with a full choir and orchestra in front of the ark of the covenant. In the process of creating a processional for all to see, King David fails to follow God’s instructions on the proper protocol for transporting the ark. Mosaic Law is

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72 Kleinig, 37.
very clear that the ark should be covered, carried with poles on the shoulders of Levites, and
never touched (Exodus 25:14-15; Deuteronomy 10:8; Numbers 4:5-6, 15; 7:9).

While in route to Jerusalem, the oxen stumble and Uzza stretches out his hands to help
stabilize the ark. God kills Uzza instantly (v.7, 9-10). The ark is to not to be touched nor carried
on a cart.

Three months later, David tries again, but this time he follows the Lord’s command to the
letter. David gathers all Israel together to bring the ark to Jerusalem and he instructs the Levites
in 1 Chronicles 15:12-15, as follows:

12 You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you
and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel to the
place I have prepared for it. 13 For because you did not do it the first time, the
Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the
proper order.” 14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up
the ark of the Lord God of Israel. 15 And the children of the Levites bore the ark
of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the
word of the Lord.

In 1 Chronicles 15, David gives instructions for transporting “the ark of the covenant”
and for proclaiming worship by the choir:

2 “No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites, for the Lord has chosen them
to carry the ark of God and to minister before Him forever.” 16 Then David spoke
to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers
accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals,
by raising the voice with resounding joy. 17 So the Levites appointed Heman the
son of Joel; and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of their brethren,
the sons of Merari, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; 18 and with them their brethren of
the second rank: Zechariah, Ben, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab,
Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Elipheleth, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel, the
gatekeepers; 19 the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound the cymbals
of bronze; 20 Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and
Benaiah, with strings according to Alamoth; 21 Mattithiah, Elipheleth, Mikneiah,
Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah, to direct with harps on the Sheminith; 22
Chenaniah, leader of the Levites, was instructor in charge of the music, because
he was skillful; 23 Berechiah and Elkanah were doorkeepers for the ark; 24
Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the
priests, were to blow the trumpets before the ark of God; and Obed-Edom and Jehiah, doorkeepers for the ark.

The use of choir in the transportation of the ark to Jerusalem establishes new precedent for worship leading. The command is given to establish a choir and the people immediately comply (vs 16-17).  

The names of those appointed as Levitical singers and musicians are then listed, one by one. The Chronicler specifies the duties of the singers who play the cymbals, strings, and harp. King David assigns three guilds or chief leaders from the tribe of Levi to organize the choir and its musicians, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan. His plan is to define the function of the choir and establish a new paradigm or form for worship by raising “the voice with resounding joy (v.16).”

After David appoints Heman, Asaph, and Ethan as “three Levitical guilds,” he then appoints Chenaniah as “music master with the singers” (vs. 27b). Bible scholar Adam Clarke suggests that Chenaniah,

Gave the key and the time, for he presided in the elevation, probably meaning what is called pitching the tune, for he was skillful in music, and powerful in his voice, and well qualified to lead the band: he might have been precentor.

A precentor is one “who leads a congregation in its singing.” The general consensus is that Chenaniah was skillful, a leader of choral music, and director of congregational worship.

Pastor, John George Norton, author of Worship in Heaven and on Earth, demonstrates an organizational pattern in 1 Chronicles 15:

1. At the head of the procession are Heman, Asaph, Ethan, and probably a band of others, with cymbals, sounding clear and loud, in order to heighten the sound (both of the song and of the instrumental music) to joy; that is, to the expression of high festive joy.

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73 Louis C. Jonker, 1 and 2 Chronicles (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Publishing Group. 2013), 111.
75 The Oxford American Dictionary, s.v. “Precentor.”
2. This group is followed by a choir of Soprano Singers, accompanying themselves with musical instruments.
3. The Bass voices, with instrumental accompaniments follow the sopranos.
4. Chenaniah, who, as “chief of the Levites and captain of the bearers,” walks immediately behind the choir of bass voices.
5. After Chenaniah are the two doorkeepers of the Ark.
6. Preceding the Ark are a band of Priests blowing silver trumpets.
7. “The children of the Levites bore the Ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord.”
8. Immediately after the Ark and its bearers, are another band of Priests blowing silver trumpets.
9. A second set of two doorkeepers for the Ark follow the silver trumpets.
10. King David, clothed in byssus like others in the procession, is wearing, as the head of a priestly nation, the white ephod of the high-priest-hood. King David is recognized as the leader of the chorus.
11. Following the king, is a vast chorus of 30,000 singers supported by musical instruments of all kinds.  

King David organizes a new location and the transportation of the ark to Jerusalem with a choir and instrumentalists leading the way.

**King David and His Organization for Worship – The Form**

The second stage of David’s organizational plan for choral music comes from 1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:4-6, 37-42. David places the ark of the covenant under its Tent in Jerusalem:

“David built houses for himself in the city of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it” (1 Chronicles 15:1 NKJV).

King David institutes choral music into the Hebrew worship routine both in Gibeon and Jerusalem:

4 And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel: 5 Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; 6 Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.

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So he left Asaph and his brothers there before the ark of the covenant of the Lord to minister before the ark regularly, as every day’s work required; and Obed-Edom with his sixty-eight brethren, including Obed-Edom the son of Jeduthun, and Hosah, to be gatekeepers; and Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord at the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt offering regularly morning and evening, and to do according to all that is written in the Law of the Lord which He commanded Israel; and with them Heman and Jeduthun and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the Lord, because His mercy endures forever; and with them Heman and Jeduthun, to sound aloud with trumpets and cymbals and the musical instruments of God. Now the sons of Jeduthun were gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 16:4-6, 37-42 NKJV).

In addition to developing a guide for how the choir should function in Hebrew worship, King David also outlines liturgical form and process. First, the King incorporates choral music at both places of worship in Jerusalem and Gibeon. The Levitical trumpeters and singers minister before the ark in Jerusalem as well as during the burnt sacrifices at the Tabernacle in Gibeon. Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen explain:

Since the Chronicler represents that no regular sacrifices were made in Jerusalem at this time it may be inferred that these Levites were to conduct the musical liturgy before the ark at the same time that the offerings were being made on the altar at Gibeon with corresponding musical service. The two priests also sounded the two silver trumpets as if present at the burnt-offerings.  

Apparently, David coordinates two services at two different locations at the same exact time with choral music taking an unprecedented role in the worship service itself.

Second, responsibility for and authority of Tabernacle worship leading still remains in the hands of the three Levitical guilds. King David instructs Asaph to lead the instrumentalists and singers in Jerusalem while Heman and Jeduthun are responsible for the choral singing and musicians in Gibeon (vs. 37-42).

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The third and final stage of David’s organization for choral music comes near the end of his reign; when creating the blueprints for establishing Temple worship. The Temple is not constructed until the reign of King Solomon, but God does put into the heart of King David the organizational processes for choral music within the Temple. These procedures are incorporated into the worship service at the Tabernacle in Gibeon and before the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem. King David instructs four thousand singers:

To stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at evening; and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the Lord on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the Lord (1 Chronicles 23:30-31).

King David further defines the roles of the Levitical choir. First, they are to stand and sing in the presence of the Lord. Second, they are reminded that they are to exclusively thank and praise the Lord. Third, they are to provide this service according to prescribed liturgical order -- in the mornings, evenings, daily burnt offerings, and when burnt sacrifices are offered up to the Lord.

Organizationally, King David separates the Levites into divisions according to their family genealogy so that the sons of Aaron may be “set apart as priests from the rest of the Levites.”79 This provides for the Levites a system – a formal chain of command – for priestly duties of ministry in preparation for Temple worship (See Figure 2 on page 43.)

1 Chronicles 15:22 indicates that Chenaniah is the “leader of the Levites, the instructor in charge of the music. He is a skilled musician, “music master with the singers.”

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79 1 Chronicles 23:6-29; 25
Figure 2 - David's Order of Musicians in the Temple
The chief heads or guilds over all the singers and musicians are Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman; who are responsible for ministering at the Tabernacle in Gibeon, the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem, and eventually in the Temple during the reign of King Solomon.

Asaph is a Levitical singer and percussionist, the son of Berachiah, a doorkeeper for the Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 15:17). Asaph is appointed chief to sing, thank, praise the Lord, and make music daily with cymbals, harps, and stringed instruments (1 Chronicles 16:4-5, 37).80

Not only is Asaph a singer, composer, musician, and chief of the guilds, but he is also a prophet or seer (2 Chronicles 29:30).81 As a seer to King David, Asaph writes twelve compositions82 that are included in the Psalms.83 Of these twelve psalms, three are prophetic in nature.84

Heman is an Ezrahite from the “sons of Korah” (Psalm 88:1). He is appointed by King David to “prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 25:1). He is the grandson of the prophet, Samuel (1 Chronicles 6:33-34) and, like Asaph, gifted as a seer. (1 Chronicles 25:5). Heman has fourteen sons and three daughters and serves fulltime at the Tabernacle in Gibeon by “singing and making music unto the Lord.” He eventually serves in the Temple once it has been constructed during the reign of King Solomon.85

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80 In 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 David writes a psalm of thanksgiving and gives that psalm to Asaph and his brethren to sing and play unto the Lord. David then tasks Asaph and his brethren to be responsible for all the singing, which includes all the music and worship before the ark in Jerusalem while the other guilds fulfill the same purpose in Gibeon.

81 The Oxford American Dictionary, s.v. “Seer.”

82 Psalm 50, 73-83. Asaph’s authorship is confirmed by the phrase le’asaf in the superscription of the psalms, that translates to “Asaph.”


84 Psalm 50 foretells about the coming of the Lord where those who call upon His name will be saved, Psalm 80 foretells the same message, while Psalm 78 prophesies that the coming Messiah will teach through the use of parables.

85 It appears that Heman is very wise as his wisdom is compared with the wisdom of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:31). In Heman’s lifetime, he is a seer, singer, songwriter of Psalm 88, a father, and a man of influence.
Jeduthun is from the family of Merari. In 1 Chronicles 25:3, he prophesizes “with harp to give thanks and praise to the LORD.” Jeduthun’s sons are singers and musicians that serve as gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 16:42). Jeduthun is unique in that in addition to being a musician, a seer (prophet to the king), and singer, he holds the prestigious honor of “choir director.”

Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun with their families and descendants, minister as prophetic singers and musicians in the Tabernacle and Temple for generations to come. Each man, in their own way, established a legacy for the use of choir in Temple worship as their families assumed strategic roles of leadership with the new “King David Worship Order.” For example, the four sons from Asaph, six sons from Jeduthun, and fourteen sons from Heman are organized as twenty-four leaders, each directing twelve other musically gifted members. In total, at least two hundred and eighty-eight skillful singers and musicians (1 Chronicles 25:7) oversee nearly four thousand performers -- all instructed to praise the Lord in song (1 Chronicles 23:5 and 1 Chronicles 25:8.)

King Solomon and His Presentation of Worship

After the death of David, Solomon, David’s son with Bathsheba, is anointed Monarch of Israel. In one of his first acts as king, Solomon goes to the Tabernacle in Gibeon to offer one-thousand burnt offerings to the Lord (2 Chronicles 1:6). According to David’s instructions on choral singing, the Levitical choir is required to sing for all burnt offerings. While Solomon is in Gibeon, the Levitical choir sings praise to the Lord the entire day. It is in response to Solomon’s sincere, heartfelt worship that the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream:

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86 Psalm 39, 62, and 77 are psalms are written by David and Asaph “To the Choirmaster: According to Jeduthun” (ESV), indicating that his choir and musicians lead the congregation in worship with these songs. Jeduthun and his sons are co-laborers with Heman and his sons at the Tabernacle in Gibeon.

On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, “Ask! What shall I give you?” And Solomon said to God: “You have shown great mercy to David my father, and have made me king in his place. Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?”

Then God said to Solomon: “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king— wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like.”

(2 Chronicles 1:7-12 NKJV)

In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon begins building the Temple, which takes seven years to finish (1 Kings 6:38). Once the Temple is complete, the priests travel to Zion, the City of David, and move the ark into the inner sanctuary of the new Temple. 2 Chronicles 5 gives record of the event:

And it came to pass when the priests came out of the Most Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions), and the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets—indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever,” that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (2 Chronicles 5:11-14 NKJV).

Pastor and Theologian, Dr. Peter Leithart, explains:

“Yahweh’s descent in glory is a response to the sacrifices and songs of the priests and Levites... Sacrifices and song surround the event; without sacrifice and song, the Lord does not come near.”

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Curtis and Madsen state, “The Chronicler introduces the appearance of the cloud coincident with a great burst of music and praise.”  

And, Dr. Kleinig writes:

Liturgical song began only after the ark had been deposited in the temple, and that its performance was associated with the entrance of the LORD’s glory into the temple. Thus, while he does not entirely dissociate the divine glory from the ark, he links its advent with the performance of choral music… the transferal of the ark was a precondition for the appearance of the LORD’s glory, but its [The Lord’s] actual entrance into the temple occurred during the singing of sacred song.  

The consensus of these scholars is that God responds to the call of His people when the moment the Levitical choir and instrumentalists praise and bless His name with all of their heart. – in one accord. Several factors make this moment in history unique:

First, the location of its choir and musicians is on the east end of the altar. This is important as it signifies how close they are to the altar while singing and leading corporate worship.

Second, the Levitical choir’s sons and brethren are invited to sing along in this grand celebration. Authors, Kaufman Kohler and Judah David Eisenstein observe:

These young Levites "sweetened" the music with their soprano voices, but were not permitted to use instruments, and were restricted from entering the priests' hall in the Temple before the adult Levites had begun to sing… they were not allowed to stand on the same platform with the latter, but had to take up a position on the ground below ('Ar. 13b).

From the inception of Temple worship, the Levitical choirs are multigenerational. All generations of worshipers sang and lead praises together.

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89 Curtis and Madsen, 339.
90 Kleinig, 164.
After the Levitical choir and its musicians sing and praise the Lord, King Solomon kneels down, spreads his hands toward heaven and proclaims a powerfully passionate prayer of dedication:

12 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands 13 (for Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven); 14 and he said:

“Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. 15 You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day. 16 Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man sit before Me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk in My law as you have walked before Me.’ 17 And now, O Lord God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David. 18 “But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! 19 Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: 20 that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where You said You would put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. 21 And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive. . . . 40 Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place. 41 “Now therefore, Arise, O Lord God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, And let Your saints rejoice in goodness. 42 “O Lord God, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed; Remember the mercies of Your servant David.” (2 Chronicles 6:12-21, 40-42 NKJV).

After his prayer, God sends fire from heaven and consumes the burnt offerings and sacrifices. At this moment, the Israelites bow their faces to the ground and begin singing the same song that the Levitical choir was singing in 2 Chronicles 5:13: “For [the Lord] is good, For His mercy endures forever” (2 Chronicles 7:3 NKJV).

The completion of the Temple as well as the implementation of choral music within Temple worship is now achieved:
Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of the Lord which he had built before the vestibule, according to the daily rate, offering according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the three appointed yearly feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. And, according to the order of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, the Levites for their duties (to praise and serve before the priests) as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at each gate; for so David the man of God had commanded. They did not depart from the command of the king to the priests and Levites concerning any matter or concerning the treasuries. Now all the work of Solomon was well-ordered from the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was completed (2 Chronicles 8:12-16 NKJV).

These powerful worship events are defining moments for the people of God. Solomon is faithful to honor the Lord, and in the process, he carries out the instructions placed in King David’s heart. Solomon carefully fulfills the Mosaic Covenant by establishing a prescribed place, number, manner and time for burnt offerings and sacrifices. He reaffirms the Temple’s use for worship and the yearly festivals.

Conclusion

This chapter provides documentation of the biblical precedent for choirs in Tabernacle and Temple worship, including: 1) The organization for choral music during the transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) The organization for choral music within the Tent, Tabernacle, and Temple; 3) Worship practices during the Temple dedication service by King Solomon; 4) Choral music practiced during Temple liturgy; and, 5) Strategic responsibilities for worship by the Levitical Guilds under the monarch leadership of Kings David and Solomon.

Five key factors establish biblical precedent for the worship leading choir:

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93 Kleinig, 60.
First, God commanded the use of choir through His servant David, Gad the seer, and Nathan the prophet (2 Chronicles 29:25).

Second, instrumentation is used to underscore the Levitical Choir. This is first seen when the ark of the covenant is transported to Jerusalem as well as at the dedication service of Solomon’s Temple.

Third, organization and structure of the choir in worship by King David provides a paradigm for the Levitical choir that future generations may use in Temple worship.

Fourth, the choir is strategically used and instructed to sing at every corporate gathering within the Tabernacle and Temple during morning and evening sacrifices, to burnt offerings, Sabbaths, New Moons, set feasts and celebrations.

Finally, multigenerational singing is encouraged during corporate worship in both the congregation and within the worship leading choir. This is emphasized at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple.

In the next chapter, attention is given to choral practices during the reign of the Judean Kings; use of choir during the post-captivity period in Jerusalem; worship at the dedication of the second Temple; and, celebration of rebuilding the wall around their Holy City, Jerusalem.
Chapter 5
Old Testament Precedent – Judean Kings and Post-Exilic Worship

In this chapter, attention is given to choral practices during the reign of the Judean Kings; use of choir during the post-captivity period in Jerusalem; worship at the dedication of the second Temple; and, celebration of rebuilding the wall around the Holy City, Jerusalem.

The Levitical Choir During the Reign of King Jehoshaphat

In one of the most iconic stories of song and worship in Scripture, King Jehoshaphat commands the Levitical choir to lead the Judean army into battle.

In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat is king of Judah. The armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are marching in the fields of En Gedi towards Jerusalem. When word reaches Jehoshaphat, the king becomes deeply afraid and seeks the Lord and proclaims a fast throughout all the land. As all the people gather together at the Temple court in Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat prays:

O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? 7 Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? 8 And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, 9 ‘If disaster comes upon us—sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine—we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save,’ 10 And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them—11 here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. 12 O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.” (II Chronicles 20:5-12 NKJV)

After Jehoshaphat’s prayer, God speaks through a Levite, a singer from the guild of Asaph by the name of Jahaziel. Jahaziel tells King Jehoshaphat:
Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them… You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you” (2 Chron. 20:15b-16a, 17a NKJV).\footnote{94}

When Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah hear this prophecy, they bow their heads to the ground and worship the Lord while the children of the Kohathites and the Korahites stand up and praise the Lord “with voices loud and high” (2 Chronicles 20:19).

The next morning, Jehoshaphat and the Judean army, led by the Levitical choir and its musicians, make their way to the battlefront at the Wilderness of Tekoa:

Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.” And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: “Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever (2 Chron. 20:20-21 NKJV).

Jehoshaphat personally appoints those who should sing and praise the Lord as they go into battle. The army is led into conflict by a Levitical choir singing, “Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever.”\footnote{95} In times past, when the Israelites or Judeans would march into battle, the priestly trumpeters would sound the battle cry to attack (Numbers 10:9; 31:6; 2 Chronicles 13:12). However, this time the priestly trumpeters are supplemented with the Temple musicians.\footnote{96} The Levitical choir replaces the battle cry with a song of worship.\footnote{97}

Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.\footnote{94, 95, 96, 97}
when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped (2 Chronicles 20:22-24 NKJV).

Dr. Martin J. Selman observes,

“There can be no clearer indication that this was neither an ordinary battle, thou the Lord acts on His own, the Levitical choir and its musicians stand in place and praise the Lord.”

Two principles reaffirm the Levitical choir in worship: First, by placing the choir at the frontlines, the King and the people of Judah demonstrate their full trust and confidence in the Lord, Kleinig writes,

“They showed their faith in his prophets both by acting on the prophetic word of Jahaziel and by relying on the prophetic power of the words sung by the Levites to give them the victory.”

Second, the King and the people of Judah are obedient. They position themselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:17). As the choir begins to sing and worship, Yahweh turns the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir against one another. They ensue in battle until every last man is killed. For the next three days, the Judeans collect all the spoil, until on the fourth day, they assemble in the Valley of Berachah (or Valley of Blessing):

Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:26-28).

Three events underscore their worship: First, they assemble to bless the Lord at the Valley of Berachah. Second, Jehoshaphat leads the army of Judah back to Jerusalem with joy. Everyone

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98 Selman, 426.
99 Kleinig, 178.
100 Leithart, 175.
rejoices, including husbands, wives and children. Third, they celebrate with all kinds of music, instrumental and vocal as they march to the Temple.

For the first time in Judean history, the Levitical choir participates in battle by singing to the Lord. And, the Judean army stood back and observed without drawing a sword. Singing praises to the Lord became the weapon of choice as God proved Himself faithful. God rewarded Jehoshaphat’s faithfulness. The people of Judah enjoyed peace, free from the threat of their enemies for the remainder of his 25-year reign:

And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest around. (2 Chronicles 20:29-30 NKJV)

**Choral Singing During the Judean Monarchy**

After the death of Jehoshaphat, the people of Judah suffered for fifteen years under the monarchy leadership of two evil kings and Queen Athaliah before Joash takes the throne. Joash is seven years old when he becomes king of Judah. The priest, Jehoiada makes a covenant with the king and all its people that Judah would be the Lord’s people. In doing this, Jehoiada destroys the temple of Baal.

Jehoiada appointed the oversight of the house of the Lord to the hand of the priests, the Levites, whom David had assigned in the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was established by David (2 Chronicles 23:18 NKJV).

Because King Joash is very young, the priest, Jehoiada takes initiative to reestablish the original practices for Temple worship by Kings David and Solomon. The Levitical choir once again leads worship services with rejoicing and singing while offering sacrifices and burnt offerings.

The next three kings leading Judah after Joash are considered righteous before the Lord. Then comes Ahaz, sixteen years of evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Chronicles 28:1-4).
When Hezekiah becomes king, he again restores Temple worship. This includes: the cleansing of the Temple; reassigning all the duties and tasks of sacrificial worship to the Levitical priests; restoring burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, New Moons, and set feasts (2 Chronicles 31:3); and, restoring choral singing:

25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. 28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. 29 And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped. 30 Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped (2 Chronicles 29:25-30 NKJV).

The Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments… The whole assembly of Judah rejoiced, also the priests and Levites, all the assembly that came from Israel, the sojourners who came from the land of Israel, and those who dwelt in Judah. 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” (2 Chronicles 30:21, 25-26 NKJV).

Hezekiah stations the Levitical choir and its musicians inside the Temple court, near the burnt altar for the purpose of offering worship, just as David and Solomon had done. Hezekiah instructs the choir to sing songs written by David and Asaph. Kleinig writes:

Just as the decree of David had inaugurated the creation of the choral rite, so the decree of Hezekiah inaugurated the canonization of its contents… As a result of this decree, some psalms were selected for use in divine worship. They were thus given canonical status and authority as ‘the song of the LORD’ (2 Chronicles 29.27 NKJV) by virtue of their reputed origin and liturgical use.”

101 Kleinig, 62.
The words penned by David and Asaph, through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, set precedent for the use of Psalter in corporate worship. Ming Him Ko observes:

> These specifications of Davidic authority along with the authority of three major prophets show the Chronicler’s emphasis on the Levite singers’ imitation of the prophetic model of David in order to foster covenantal stability.\(^{102}\)

After the death of King Hezekiah, his son Manasseh takes the throne for fifty-five years. He is followed by Kings Amom, Josiah, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. Their commitment to worship varied from time-to-time as they reinstitute multiple forms of worship. Finally, God exiles the entire Nation of Judah to Babylon. Their beloved Jerusalem is left in ruins as the people of God are held captive by the Chaldeans for over 70 years.

**The Book of Ezra and the Worshipping Community**

In 538 BC\(^ {103} \) Zerubbabel leaves Babylon with 42,360 exiles to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64). Among those exiles are 148 singers, all descendants of Asaph (Nehemiah 7:44), and 245 male and female singers (Nehemiah 7:67).

This is a very small percentage of Judeans as most decide to remain in Babylon. However, throughout the course of time, many Jews begin making their way back to their homeland. In due time, the Levites reestablish worship through the sacrificial system of burnt offerings and its festivals. These burnt offerings are placed upon a new restructured altar (Ezra 3:2-5) at the same location where Solomon’s Temple resided. After the altar is rebuilt, Jeshua and his priestly brethren, Zerubbabel with his brethren, the Levites, and all those who returned

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from captivity come together to lay the foundation of the new Temple. Once the foundation is laid, the people celebrate in worship:

When the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David, king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel.” (Ezra 3:10-11a NKJV).

This reestablished Levitical choir from the sons of Asaph sing together, “responsively,” for the first time in seventy years. Together, they sing Psalm 136, the same song used at the dedication service for Solomon’s Temple and on the frontlines of battle during the reign of Jehoshaphat. As the choir leads the people to sing, many of its worshippers respond differently:

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off (Ezra 3:11b-13 NKJV).

Other than the elders weeping, the description of this dedication service is very similar to the worship service described at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (2 Chronicles 5). Authors, Leslie C. Allen and Timothy S. Laniak write about this occasion from Ezra 3:

“The trumpeters sounded a signal, here presumably for the service to start, while the Levitical musicians evidently clashed their cymbals to announce the start of the hymn quoted in verse 11.”

This dedication service remains aligned with the burnt offerings and sacrifices as outlined in the Mosaic Law.

In 515 BC, the reconstructed Temple is complete:

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“This Temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar during the sixth year of the reign of King Darius” (Ezra 6:15).

Although there was a dedication service when the foundation of the Temple was laid, a much larger and grander celebration takes place at the completion of the second Temple:

Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Ezra arrives to Jerusalem in 458 BC, fifty-seven years after Temple worship had been restored. Thousands of other exiles, including priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and singers, join in the migration (Ezra 7:1-7).

Nehemiah and the Worshipping Choir

In 445 BC, thirteen years after Ezra migrates in Jerusalem, Nehemiah, with the Persian King Artaxerxes’ blessing, arrives to rebuild the city’s wall. After fifty-two days, the wall is complete (Neh. 6:15). And, Nehemiah invites the Levitical choir, priests, and musicians to participate in a stunning dedication service with the choir singing and offering worship from the top of the wall to the Temple:

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites . . . . Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

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106 Angel, 21.
107 Ibid, 22
108 This dedication service was called Circumambulation, which is a ritual commonly attested in Antiquity in the dedication of cities and buildings. Its purpose was apparently to affirm or reaffirm the idea of enclosure around a sacred area. The Levites followed this ritual by not only singing, but they also purified themselves, the people, gates and wall (Nehemiah 12:30).
So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. After them went Hoshiaiah and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the priests’ sons with trumpets—Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.

The two thanksgiving choirs went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison. So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, Michaiah, Eluenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director (Nehemiah 12:27-42 NKJV).

The text begins with the Levites and the Levitical choir congregating together from all around the outskirts of Jerusalem. Once they gather together, they split into separate groups, including singers, seven trumpeters (vs. 33-35 and 41), eight musicians (v. 36 and 42), and its leaders and rulers (v. 32 and 40). The two Thanksgiving Choirs are organized, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right Choir (v31)</th>
<th>Left Choir (vs38b, 40a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiaiah and Leaders of Judah (v32)</td>
<td>Nehemiah and Officials (v40b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Trumpeters (vs33-35a)</td>
<td>Seven Trumpeters (v41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra (v36b)</td>
<td>(High Priest?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor Zechariah (v35b)</td>
<td>Conductor Jezrahiah (v42b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Musicians (v36)</td>
<td>Eight Musicians (v42)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two choirs sing while marching up the steps onto the city walls in opposite directions but towards the Temple. The first Thanksgiving Choir (on the right side of the wall) is led by Zechariah (v.35b). The second Thanksgiving Choir (on the left side of the wall) is led by

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109 Kleinig, 49.
Jezrahiah (v42b). Once reaching the Temple, the two Thanksgiving Choirs join together as two separate units, in antiphonal fashion and under the leadership of Jezrahiah they “sing loudly” to the Lord (Nehemiah 12:42). Professors, Dr. Nissim Amzallag and Mikhal Avriel argues:

The mixing in antiphonal fashion of two hymns previously sung separately is possible only if each segment of the text sung by isolated choirs (which later becomes an antiphonal unit mixed with its counterpart) is followed by an instrumental echo. In this way, when the two processions progressively gather, the instrumental echo performed in one procession becomes the musical accompaniment of the segment sung by the other, and reciprocally. This cross-accompaniment enables a spontaneous mixing of the individual voices in antiphonal fashion when the two choirs gradually encounter.\textsuperscript{110}

While not actually recorded in Nehemiah 12, according to Amzallag and Avriel, it seems that Psalm 122\textsuperscript{111} is most likely the lyric sung by the Thanksgiving Choirs:

1 I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.” \textsuperscript{2} Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem! \textsuperscript{3} Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, \textsuperscript{4} Where the tribes go up, The tribes of the Lord, To the Testimony of Israel, To give thanks to the name of the Lord. \textsuperscript{5} For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David. \textsuperscript{6} Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. \textsuperscript{7} Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.” \textsuperscript{8} For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, “Peace be within you.” \textsuperscript{9} Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your good. (Psalm 122:1-9 NKJV)

As soon as the two choirs reach the Temple, they sing together as one unified group under one conductor, even though they remain in an antiphonal posture.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, biblical precedent for the worship leading choir is realized through three specific applications:

First, the worship leading choir is on the frontlines of spiritual battle, leading the charge against Satan and the enemies of God as they sing praise to the Lord. In the story of Jehoshaphat,

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid

\textsuperscript{111} Psalm 120-134 are considered songs of Ascents. King David wrote Psalm 122, 124, 131, and 133.
the Levitical Choir leads the Judean army into battle while singing Psalm 136. God protects the Nation of Judah and renders them victorious in battle.

Second, the worship leading choir is permitted to sing the Psalms of David and Asaph in the Temple (2 Chronicles 29:30).\textsuperscript{112} This provides evidence that songs were specifically written by composers for use in the Temple by a Levitical Choir.

Third, the two Thanksgiving Choirs marching and singing during the dedication ceremony for the Jerusalem wall in Nehemiah 12 establishes precedent for the use of antiphonal ensemble to accomplish one common goal to worship through singing praise to the Lord.

In conclusion, although the people of Judah were in exile in the land of Babylon for over seventy years, God did not forget them. And, when the Judeans move back to Jerusalem, they immediately rebuild the Temple, construct a new wall, and reestablish Temple worship, including the practice of choral singing in praise to God. This is further demonstrated at the dedication ceremony of the second Temple’s in Ezra 3:10-11a, at the rebuilding of the city wall, and at the dedication service in Nehemiah 12.

Both Nehemiah and Ezra demonstrate the importance of using choirs for worship, in their celebrations, at times of dynamic praise to God, during the reign of their kings, and when serving the Lord in one unified voice, together.

\textsuperscript{112} Kleinig, 62.
Chapter 6
Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: 1) Provide an overview of the purpose, process, organization, and research findings for this thesis; and, 2) Present possible areas for future research as related to the precedent of choir in a worship leading role.

The purpose of this paper is to discover and investigate foundational, biblical precedent for the role of the worship leading choir in the Old Testament. This study includes an articulation of worship practices in the wilderness, at the Tabernacle, Temple, and during the post-exilic period of the Old Testament.

The research process includes an investigation of any precedent and strategic role of choir in Old Testament corporate worship. Methodological process encompasses a combination of biblical, historical and descriptive research technique. Attention is given to discovering and articulating a viable precedent for choir and their strategic worship leading roles throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Descriptive research provides opportunity to examine biblical and historical literature. Various Old Testament teachings, biblical examples and theological exhortation are used to establish a precedent, paradigm and process for supporting this worship leading notion. Further, this study relied heavily on biblical research, historical records, documents, published and unpublished research available in scholarly journals and magazine articles, dissertations, theological books and commentaries, as well as online internet blogs.

Organizationally, the thesis is divided into three categories: (1) The books from the Pentateuch, (2) Tabernacle and Temple worship during the reign of King David and Solomon, and (3) Temple worship during the reign of the Judean kings and the post-exilic period recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.
Research conclusions may be beneficial to pastors, worship leaders, church leadership, and church congregants as a platform in building a theology for the role of the worship leading choir.

Overview of Study

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and includes: A statement of the problem, thesis purpose, significance of the study to an on-going worship discipline, research methodology, research limitations and, structural organization.

Chapter 2 is an annotated literature review of relevant books, dissertations, theses, scholarly articles, journals and internet postings. Relevancy for each resource is thoroughly articulated, providing documentation, support and organization for the study.

Chapter 3 explores the biblical precedent for choirs within the Pentateuch through songs penned by the hand of Moses, which provide a new paradigm for choral music in corporate worship. The chapter considers four areas of investigation: (1) Worship by Moses Through Song; (2) Worship in the Tabernacle; (3) Other Instructions for Worship; and (4) Three Choral Genre within the Pentateuch. This chapter focuses on worship in the wilderness before the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

Chapter 4 outlines King David’s organizational plan for worship, King Solomon’s presentation of worship at the Temple Dedication in Jerusalem, and the Hebrew use of choir in worship. In particular, the chapter provides documentation of the biblical precedent for choirs in Tabernacle and Temple worship, including: 1) The organization for choral music during the transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) The organization for choral music within the Tent, Tabernacle, and Temple; 3) Worship practices during the Temple dedication service by King
Solomon; 4) Choral music practiced during Temple liturgy; and, 5) Strategic responsibilities for worship by the Levitical Guilds and monarch leadership.

Chapter 5 focuses on the significance of the Levitical Choir during the reign of King Jehoshaphat and choral singing during the Judean monarch. Documentation for worship practices is found in the dedication services for: 1) the second Temple, 2) Rebuilt wall by Nehemiah, and 3) during the post-exilic period from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The organization of the Levitical choir during the processional march at the dedication ceremony for the Jerusalem wall is closely examined as well as which song or songs could have possibly been implemented.

Discoveries and Observations

This section will articulate discoveries and observations of the research into the Old Testament precedent the worship leading choir. These discoveries are primarily biblical in nature and based on research of the Pentateuch; worship practices and paradigms by King David and Solomon; worship during the reign of the Judean kings; and two strategic dedication services during the post-exilic period.

In chapter three, we discover biblical precedent for the worshiping choir from the Pentateuch in three major ways:

First, is the use of “anamnesis” as a method for memorizing song lyrics, but more importantly, for remembering God’s laws, statutes, and history. It is through these songs of Moses that the Hebrew people remember the Lord, their God.

Second, song lyrics give worshipers the opportunity to sing together, unified as one corporate body. This is seen through each song that the children of Israel are taught as they are instructed to sing together as an act of worship.
Third, the worshiping choir is invited to sing multiple styles and genres of music that share the same message of God’s love, faithfulness, provision, and deliverance from one’s enemies.

In short, this chapter emphasizes Moses’ song writing practices, leadership in the congregation, rules for Tabernacle celebration, the establishment of “the Law” and various acts of worship. Three different song forms are discussed: the antiphonal, the chant, and the call and response. Each genre provides a model for worship practice in the Tabernacle.

In chapter four, five key factors establish biblical precedent for the worship leading choir:

First, God commanded the use of choir through His servant David, Gad the seer, and Nathan the prophet (2 Chronicles 29:25).

Second, instrumentation is used to underscore the Levitical Choir. This is first seen when the ark of the covenant is transported to Jerusalem as well as at the dedication service of Solomon’s Temple.

Third, organization and structure of the choir in worship by King David provides a paradigm for the Levitical choir that future generations may use in Temple worship.

Fourth, the choir is strategically used and instructed to sing at every corporate gathering within the Tabernacle and Temple during morning and evening sacrifices, to burnt offerings, Sabbaths, New Moons, set feasts and celebrations.

Finally, multigenerational singing is encouraged during corporate worship in both the congregation and within the worship leading choir. This is emphasized at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple.

And, in chapter five, biblical precedent for the worship leading choir provide three specific applications:
First, the worship leading choir is on the frontlines of spiritual battle, leading the charge against Satan and the enemies of God as they sing praise to the Lord. In the story of Jehoshaphat, the Levitical Choir leads the Judean army into battle while singing Psalm 136. God protects the Nation of Judah and renders them victorious in battle.

Second, the worship leading choir is permitted to sing the Psalms of David and Asaph in the Temple (2 Chronicles 29:30). This provides evidence that songs were specifically written by composers for use in the Temple by a Levitical Choir.

Third, the two Thanksgiving Choirs marching and singing during the dedication ceremony for the Jerusalem wall in Nehemiah 12 establishes precedent for the use of antiphonal ensemble to accomplish one common goal to worship through singing praise to the Lord.

Recommendations

Based on research from this study of the Old Testament precedent for the worship leading choir are the following recommendations:

First, chapter three documents the practice of writing “original,” indigenous songs (psalms) specifically for use by choir and in leading worship with the assembly. Additionally, worship leading choirs used a variety of musical forms, styles, and genre as a communication platform for building community within their culture. Perhaps this Old Testament practice should be modeled in the 21st century evangelical community. Church fellowships, communities and denominational assemblies with worship leading choirs should consider following the Old Testament pattern and employ the services of songwriters as primary agents for communicating theology, doctrine and Christian practice songs and hymns familiar to their own culture.

\[\text{Kleinig, 62.}\]
Second, chapter four places special emphasis on the implementation of multi-
generational choirs in Tabernacle and Temple worship. The older musicians mentored the
younger. Perhaps the use of worship leading choir in contemporary praise and worship venues
can follow this Old Testament model by providing opportunity for establishing multi-
generational choirs, ensembles and praise bands in the regular worship leading routine and cycle.
This provides opportunity for training and equipping future generations as qualified, fully
equipped worship leaders as they participate in the worship process themselves.

Finally, chapter five places emphasis on the purpose, position, posture and process of the
choir leading worship in action. First, the purposes of the choir are clearly defined – exalt the
name of the Lord. Second, the choir ensemble itself boldly assumes the front-line of battle. The
Old Testament conflict encompasses a real, tangible battle with swords and shields. But, it also
engages in a spiritual battle. Third, the Old Testament account gives evidence of the choirs
embracing the use of scripture in song. It is recommended that choirs engaged in 21st century
worship leading responsibility should keep their purposes one of proclaiming, promoting and
exalting the name of Jesus. Afterall, today’s church leaders and worship practitioners are called
to combat the forces of evil on various levels every bit as much as Old Testament choirs engaged
in real, honest spiritual warfare. Singing the Word of God through Scripture song is one of most
effective weapons for use by worship leading choirs in this engagement.

Future Research

This section enumerates several possible areas of future research related to the role of the
worship leading choir.

(1) Research should be conducted that compares the role of the Levitical choir in
synagogue worship with that previously practiced in the Temple. An outgrowth of this study
might include researching the choral singing practices in worship during the intertestamental period.

(2) Continuing with the theme of establishing biblical precedent, research should be conducted that focuses on the role of the worship leading choir in the New Testament and early church. In addition to studying the biblical accounts of angelic choirs at the birth of Christ, the hymn singing by Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper, or principles for singing in the New Testament epistles, research should include an investigation of any historical precedent for worship choir in official Jewish oral law, The Mishnah.

(3) Research that focuses on eye-witness accounts by John the Apostle in The Revelation should be considered. Using the eschatological heavenly choir practices during the reign of Christ’s Kingdom as a template, perhaps precedent for liturgies for modern-day worship leading may be created that specifically include the worship leading choir.¹¹⁴

(4) A doctoral level research project should also look into the history of the worship leading choir during the early church.

(5) A study based on comparative research technique might show the similarities and differences for the use of a worship leading choir by the Judean kings of the Old Testament and the British monarchy from 1500 to 1725.¹¹⁵

(6) Using the findings of this study as a point of precedent and departure, a research study of the benefits for a worship leading choir in 21st century evangelical worship might include: 1) examining the relationship between the worship leading choir and congregational singing; 2) establishing the biblical and historical precedent of developing children’s singing groups and

¹¹⁴ Revelation 4, 5, 7 and 19 might provide effective Biblical resource for this study.
choir as significant agents of worship; and, 3) studying the dynamic of developing training pedagogy for the worship leading choir.

(7) A qualitative research project studying the benefits of the worship leading choir to the overall church mission might provide adequate source material for developing practical curricula in the training of lay-persons for local church ministry.

(8) The dynamic role of a worship leading choir in multicultural church settings can provide a platform for qualitative and quantitative research. Perhaps the findings from this project may provide adequate source material in developing a worship leading choir pedagogy.

Concluding Remarks

This paper was written out of a passion to see the worship leading choir flourish in the twenty-first century church. Rationale for this study is three-fold: First, there seems to be a lack of biblical or theological understanding by local church pastors and its worship leadership on the choir’s role in worship. This study focused on the biblical precedent for worship leading choirs in an attempt to answer the question, “What does the Bible say about choir?”

Second, biblical examples of the role for choir in worship, the need for promoting unity in the congregation through choir, and the contribution of choral groups to corporate singing continue to serve as examples for the expanding and technologically savvy 21st century evangelical church. Whether making application to a smaller, struggling church plant with limited resources or to a large mega church fellowship, the benefits of using choir (no matter the size) in a worship leading context is the same. It is the sincere desire of this author that our study of Old Testament precedent for a worship leading choir contributes to this discussion.
Third, it is this author’s desire that leadership in Christian colleges and universities boasting robust worship degree programs will find this study of benefit as they establish precedent for establishing worship leading choirs with their own students.

Finally, while this paper establishes a biblical precedent for the worship leading choir in the Old Testament, it is this author’s desire that principles gleaned from the Doctor of Worship Studies writing project, coupled with the truth of Colossians 3:16 to “teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” provide platform and purpose for demonstrating how the worship leading choir of the 21st century can enable congregations to better “sing and make melody to the Lord together.”
Bibliography


Appendix A

Defense PowerPoint Presentation

THE OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT FOR THE ROLE OF THE WORSHIP LEADING CHOIR

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF WORSHIP STUDIES

August 2020

Justin McLaughlin

Problem Statement

• From 1998 to 2012 Churches in America with choirs declined from 72.3% to 57.2%.¹

• Decline in the use of choir for evangelical worship may be grouped into one of four categories: 1) Decline in overall church membership, 2) Availability of capable volunteers from the church membership, 3) Cost of maintaining a choir, and 4) The culture of the community.²

• What is the biblical precedent for choir in worship?


Purpose Statement

• The purpose of this paper is to discover and investigate the foundational, biblical precedent for the role of choir in the Old Testament.

• This study includes an articulation of worship practices in the wilderness, at the Tabernacle, Temple, and during the post-exilic period of the Old Testament.

Significance of the Study

• Significance of this study may be seen in:
  • The application of learned precedent to the role of choir in present-day worship practice
  • Facilitating the teaching and admonishing aspect of congregational worship (Colossians 3:16)
  • Providing opportunity to demonstrate group participation in corporate worship
  • “New model for choir-led congregational worship” replace the “old model for a performing choir”
Statement Of Limitations

- This study focuses on establishing Biblical precedent for the role of choir in worship in the Old Testament. This does not include an investigation of choir in New Testament worship, The Revelation, early church, church history, or contemporary 21st Century worship leading process. Further, this study does not investigate the use of instruments or technology in worship.

Overview

- Ch. 1 - Introduction, Background, Problem, Purpose and Significance, Methodology, Limitations, Structure and Organization, and Definition of Terms
- Ch. 3 - Biblical precedent for choirs in The Pentateuch, which includes worship in the wilderness, inception of Tabernacle worship, and the songs of Moses.
- Ch. 4 - Biblical precedent for choirs during the reigns of King David and Solomon, which include 1) Organization for choral music during the transportation of the ark of the covenant; 2) Organization for choral music within the Tent, Tabernacle, and Temple; 3) Worship practices during the Temple dedication service by King Solomon; 4) Choral music practiced during Temple liturgy; and, 5) Strategic responsibilities for worship by the Levitical Guilds and monarch leadership.
- Ch. 5 - Choral music in times of war and during the reign of the Judean kings as well as in worship during the post-exilic period with Ezra and Nehemiah.
Discoveries and Observations

Chapter 3 From the Pentateuch

1. The use of “anamnesis” as a method for memorizing song lyrics pertained to God’s laws, statutes, and history.
2. Song lyrics give worshipers opportunity to sing together, unifying as one corporate body.
3. The worshiping choir is invited to sing multiple styles and musical genre.

Discoveries and Observations (Cont.)

Chapter 4 From David and Solomon

1. God commanded the use of a worship leading choir through his prophets.
2. Instrumentation is used to underscore the Levitical Choir.
3. Organizational structure for the worship leading choir provides a paradigm for future generations to follow.
4. A worship leading choir is strategically used and instructed to sing at every corporate gathering within the Tabernacle and Temple.
5. Multigenerational singing by the worship leading choir is encouraged during times of corporate assembly.
Discoveries and Observations (Cont.)

Chapter 5 From the Judean Kings and Post-Exilic Period

1. The worship leading choir precedes the army on the frontlines of battle.
2. The worship leading choir leads the charge against Satan and the enemies of God as they sing, “Give thanks to the Lord, For His love endures forever.”
3. The worship leading choir begins to sing original compositions, including the Psalms of David and Asaph.
4. The two Thanksgiving Choirs marching and singing during the dedication ceremony for the Jerusalem wall in Nehemiah 12 establishes precedent for the use of antiphonal ensemble.

The Need For Future Research:

1. Compare the role of the Levitical choir in synagogue worship with that previously practiced in the Temple.
3. The Apostle John’s eye-witness accounts of the Heavenly choir in the Revelation.
4. The history of the worship leading choir during the early church age.
5. Similarities and differences for the use of a worship leading choir by the Judean kings of the Old Testament and the British monarchy from 1500 to 1725.
6. The benefits and contributions of a worship leading choir to 21st century evangelical worship practice.
7. A qualitative research project studying the benefits of the worship leading choir to the overall mission of the church.
8. The dynamic role of a worship leading choir in multicultural church settings.