

# Powerful Prophetic Praise

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**Bible Text:** 1 Chronicles 25:1,6

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I want to read a couple of passages from the book of Revelation and then I would like you to turn back to 1 Chronicles, to the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter. But first of all in the book of Revelation chapter one and here we have a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and I would like to read in Revelation chapter one verses nine through 16 and then we will turn to Revelation 14 and a few verses there. Hear God's Word.

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.<sup>1</sup>

And then in Revelation chapter 14 in the first five verses there are some similarities between this section here and Revelation one. One of them is that you will notice that the voice from heaven in chapter 14 is also like the sound of many waters, similar to the voice we hear in the first chapter which is the voice of Christ.

Revelation 14.

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 1:9-16

heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.<sup>2</sup>

And then if you will turn back in the Old Testament, please, to 1 Chronicles 25 verse one and also verse six. “Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals; and the number of those who performed their service was...”<sup>3</sup>

And then in verses two, three and four we have a list of those who were called and verse five extends that.

All these were the sons of Heman the king’s seer to exalt him according to the words of God, for God gave fourteen sons and three daughters to Heman. All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, harps and lyres, for the service of the house of God.<sup>4</sup>

And we will complete the reading at this point.

I think for most of us the worship in which we engage weekly in the Church comes down to this: looking at the bulletin and seeing what we are called upon to do. And often I find this is the case when I am sitting myself in the pew and I have the bulletin and inevitably I am looking at the bulletin as no doubt you are to see what is coming next in the order of worship or what the Scripture lesson is, what the title to the sermon is and what is going to happen next. And often an order of worship is set forth like this. We are called to worship. We enter God’s presence. We hear God’s Word. We give praise to God. We...et cetera. And the emphasis is upon what we are do.

But I would suggest to you that worship is not so much about what you do and what I do, but worship really is more about what God is doing and what God is about and what God is up to in this circumstance in which we find ourselves each week as we gather for worship.

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 14:1-5

<sup>3</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:1

<sup>4</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:5-6

And I think this is true with regard to our praise. This is true with regard to our singing, that it is not just that we are called upon to sing certain psalms or sing certain songs as we come together for worship, but God has a plan and God has a purpose for our worship as we come together. And in the end God is pleased to use you and use me as instruments of his praise as we come together for worship.

And this is terribly important I think because this is a means of grace. This is how we grow. This is how we are lifted up toward heaven. This is God's plan and God's purpose for you and me, that when you come together for worship your corporate worship is God using you, using the likes of you as instruments of powerful prophetic praise. And you see the title to the sermon that I have given you there. Yes, I think this is part of what it is about at least that worship is God using you as instruments of powerful prophetic praise.

Now we have looked at—those of you who have been here when I have been here, at least—we have looked at some other passages in 1 Chronicles and part of what we attempted to do, at least part of what I attempted to do was to show you that there are significant times of transition in the worship of God's people.

For example, once again, during the time of Moses the sacrifices were given, the tabernacle was established and an altar was set up specifically for those sacrifices. And then when you come along to the time of David, David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and through the prophetic Word adds to the sacrifices sacred song and instrumental music and so the worship took a turn. It was different than it was under Moses.

And then you remember also, perhaps, that we said when Christ comes along there is another significant transition, that all those Old Testament sacrifices are done away with and everything that is associated with them. And then, of course, the question comes, well, why do we continue to sing? Well, because the New Testament enjoins us to do so, you see. That is part of the reason. It is just like...see, there were sacrifices much earlier. From Adam all the way up to Moses through Abraham there were sacrifices that were offered, but when Moses came along and God spoke through Moses that sacrificial system was altered significantly and formalized in very particular ways. And in the same way when those sacrifices were done away with and everything that pertains to them, we continue to sing because it is enjoined upon us to do so.

Now when we come to David in this text in 1 Chronicles 25 we observe, once again, that David sets aside certain of the Levites to do the work of singing. It is a very interesting thing. Well, maybe it is just interesting to people like me, but I hope it comes to be interesting to you, also.

“Moreover David,” 1 Chronicles 25:1, “Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals.”<sup>5</sup> And so here we have the introduction of this new form of worship by God. And I want you to see that this is something that just does not come about willy nilly.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:1

Turn back, if you would, to 1 Chronicles 23 and verses 24 and following. You may just have to turn a page in your Bible. It says:

These were the sons of Levi according to their fathers' households, even the heads of the fathers' households of those of them who were counted, in the number of names by their census, doing the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from twenty years old and upward. For David said, "The LORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, and He dwells in Jerusalem forever. Also, the Levites will no longer need to carry the tabernacle and all its utensils for its service."<sup>6</sup>

Why was this change coming about? Because there was going to be a more permanent place of worship and the Levites would no longer have to do the work of toting around all the parts of the tabernacle as they did in the wilderness. All of this was foreshadowed in Moses.

Would you look at another text with me, please? Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse eight. We are going to come back to 1 Chronicles 25. Deuteronomy 10 and verse eight. Notice what God's aid to Moses here. "At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD."<sup>7</sup> Well, the time would come when the Levites would no longer carry the covenant, ark of the covenant and the other parts of the tabernacle because there was a permanent place of worship. And so what does the text say? "At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day."<sup>8</sup> So the time would come when the Levites would stand before the Lord and give praise to God and sing to God and bless the name of God and speak well of God.

See, it was all planned and it was all purposed by God.

Let's go back, now, to 1 Chronicles chapter 25. You see, as this was all planned and purposed by God the sacred songs, as we have said, were specifically associated with the sacrifices that were performed on the altar. The sacred songs were a part of the sacrifice. It was not as though—understand that this was the case—it was not as though over here David said the songs were to be sung and the instruments to be played and then over here on other occasions the sacrifices were to be offered. That certainly was not the case. These two were purposefully put together so that when the sacrifices were placed on the altar according to the law of Moses, the trumpets were played over the sacrifice. And then as David instituted by the prophets through the Holy Spirit sacred song, songs were sung as the sacrifices were being performed on the altar and they were accompanied by the harps and the lyres.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Chronicles 23:24-26

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 10:8

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

And we may ask the question: What about these cymbals? Apparently, Asaph as a leader of the choir of the Levites would crash the cymbals as a signal for the singing to begin. He was the presenter.

Keep your finger there, again, in 1 Chronicles 25 and look back at 1 Chronicles 16 which we had looked at earlier. And let me just point this out to you again. 1 Chronicles 16 beginning at verse 39, 1 Chronicles 16 beginning at verse 39.

He, [that is, David] left Zadok the priest and his relatives the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place which was at Gibeon, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of burnt offering continually morning and evening, even according to all that is written in the law of the LORD, which He commanded Israel. With them [see, with the priests, not at a separate time, but with the priests] were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the LORD.<sup>9</sup>

So with the priests the Levites were designated to give thanks to the Lord and then verse 42. “And with them were Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those who should sound aloud, and with instruments for the songs of God.”<sup>10</sup>

And so all of this took place together. It was not done on separate occasions.

Look back now, again, at 1 Chronicles 25 and verse one. We learn something interesting about this singing. “Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals.”<sup>11</sup> What is this prophesying?

Look at verse six. “All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, harps and lyres.”<sup>12</sup> This prophesying was singing or this signing was a form of prophesying. The singing of the people of God, the singing of the Levites in this case was a form of prophetic utterance.

Now how would that be the case?

Well, one reason, friends, that this would be the case is this that the very words that were sung by the Levites were the words of God, that is, the words of the prophetic songs of the Psalter. They were Spirit inspired words and because the content of the praise was the prophetic, Spirit inspired Word, the songs themselves were prophetic, were a prophecy. And in 1 Chronicles 16 in that same passage that we looked at there are samples of the kinds of singing which David enjoined and they are selections from specific psalms, Psalm 105 and Psalm 96 and Psalm 106. Those are specific examples.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:39-41

<sup>10</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:42

<sup>11</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:1

<sup>12</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:6

And I would like to show you another text that indicates that this is the case if you would turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 29. All of this was formalized. 2 Chronicles 29:30. All of this was formalized in the worship of Israel. 2 Chronicles 29:30. During the revival that took place later under Hezekiah it says, “Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped.”<sup>13</sup>

And so there was a formalizing of this procedure before the altar to sing the praises of God with the very words of God. And I want to remind you of something else as you turn back, if you would, to 1 Chronicles 25. I want to remind you of something else about the nature of the temple and the tabernacle earlier. The tabernacle and the temple were the special dwelling place of God in the spirit. And you remember that when the tabernacle was first built and dedicated that God came down in the glory cloud and put his *imprimatur*, his seal of approval on that place to dwell there with the people. And then later when the temple was dedicated by Solomon a similar thing took place that the glory cloud descended upon that temple. And that glory cloud is called the shekinah glory. And the word “shekinah” means dwelling, dwelling glory, the glorious dwelling presence of God. And it looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ into his temple.

And lo and behold who is the temple of God today? You are. You are. We are the temple of the living God. We are the dwelling place of God. And so sacred song becomes prophecy even in our midst because God has chosen to dwell in our midst in a very special way and God has been pleased to direct us to use his words from Scripture to sing to him and our singing becomes prophetic. It becomes prophetic in its content and it becomes prophetic in its power as God, by the Spirit, is pleased to work in our midst.

Well, what about now these instruments in 1 Chronicles 25?

In 1 Chronicles 25:1 again they were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals and in verse six, “All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, harps and lyres.”<sup>14</sup>

And as I indicated earlier it is very likely that the cymbals were simply a signal to begin the singing. And it was really the harps that were the accompaniment of the sacred song. Even the trumpets that were played over the sacrifice were not played actually during the singing, but before the singing and during pauses in the singing. This was actually the use of the trumpet. And so it was the harps themselves that became the accompaniment to the sacred song.

And so I want you to turn back, now, to the book of Revelation to help you see what these harps are about. Would you turn back now, first of all, to Revelation chapter five? Revelation chapter five and in Revelation chapter five there is a great vision in which the God of all has a book and no one is found to open the book except the lamb and when the

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:30

<sup>14</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:6

lamb takes the book in verse eight it says, “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”<sup>15</sup> So here are the 24 elders and we can get this picture of them in our minds. And in one hand they are holding golden bowls of incense and in the other hand they are holding harps. And the text tells us what these bowls of incense represent. They represent the prayers of the saints, the incense going up. They represent the prayers of the saints.

Well, what do these harps represent? That is the appropriate question. What do those harps represent? What are the next words we find in the text? “And they sang...and they sang.”<sup>16</sup> Prayer, golden bowls of incense, harps, sacred song, prayer and praise. I think that is the symbolism.

Revelation 14. What do we find? Revelation 14. “Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.”<sup>17</sup> Here are the people of God having the seal of God and of his Son. “And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.”<sup>18</sup> What was this voice? What was this voice like?

It was like water from a thousand waterfalls descending. It as like harpists, thousands of them, playing on their harps. That is what it was like. It was like peels of thunder that we heard, would hear in the distance. That is what the singing was like.

And verse three says they sang a new song before the Lord. What was this playing of the harps or the likeness of the harps? It was their singing. That is what the harps are. The harps are the singing of the people of God in the book of Revelation. And, you see, they are not actually harps. They are like harps and like many waters falling and like thunder. And it is in the first chapter that I observed earlier that the voice of Jesus Christ is understood to be heard. It is like the sound of many waters. And then the singing later of the people of God is also like the sound of many waters. It is a replication of the voice of Christ. It is the Spirit empowered prophetic Word, the singing of the saints, the powerful voice of the Spirit. And it is like harpists playing on their harps.

Could I add one other thing to this whole idea? Do you see? What we are seeing is that those Old Testament harps in 1 Chronicles 25 look forward to something that was going to take place in the future, representative of the Spirit empowered praise of the people of God.

But where did these harps originally come from? Well, I think we have some hints of this in the Bible. But we have to go back to 1 Chronicles again.

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<sup>15</sup> Revelation 5:8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 14:1

<sup>18</sup> Revelation 14:2

I know it is a little sword drill. But I am not asking you to raise your hand.

1 Chronicles chapter 23, pretty close to where we were, 1 Chronicles chapter 23 and verse five. Here there is a recitation of the number of the Levites that were to perform this singing along with other duties that they had. "And 4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were praising the LORD with the instruments which David made for giving praise."<sup>19</sup>

And then there is a parallel in 2 Chronicles 7:6 which speaks of David making these instruments for the very specific purpose of the praise of the temple. And so just like Moses made the utensils for worship in the tabernacle and later in the temple, David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and by the direction of the prophets made the harps and the cymbals and the lyres which were to be used in the tabernacle and in the temple for the worship of God. These were no ordinary harps. These were temple utensils, temple instruments, temple vessels used for that specific purpose. And when the temple was plundered by the Babylonians and all of the utensils of the temple were carted away to Babylon it included these musical instruments and then they were later brought back to Jerusalem. And so these instruments just like the altar Moses built under the direction of the Holy Spirit, just like the tent Moses built under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit pointed forward to the gospel age and to Jesus Christ and to worship in the gospel age, so these musical instruments made specifically for the purpose of worship in the old economy pointed forward to the worship we are now engaged in. And as we see from the book of Revelation they portray for us what? Our singing which is powerful and prophetic praise.

And do you know what happens, friends, do you know what happens? God takes the likes of you and me and he recreates you and me through Jesus Christ by giving us a new heart and, as Paul says, making you a new creature in Jesus Christ.

And why does he do that? So you will serve him. And part of the way you serve him as an instrument of his work is to come to a place like this and to lift your voices in praise to God as instruments molded by the hand of God to raise praise to God.

This brings is whole circle, I think.

Your worship is God using you as instruments of his praise by the power of the Holy Spirit to prophetically lift your voices to honor him.

Worship is a wonderful thing. Worship is, yes, in many respects about what we do. But more importantly worship really is about what God does. And we need to think about it because week by week God calls you together not just for the purpose of having fellowship which is good, not just for the purpose of catching up with one another which is good, but God calls you together week by week to use you by his grace as instruments fashioned by him to give him praise and honor and glory. And when God dwells in this

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Chronicles 23:5

place and God uses you as his instruments, your singing becomes powerful, prophetic praise to his name.

When I first came to Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary and taught my first class in preaching a number of the men in that class—I won't tell you who they are—said to me, "Preaching in the seminary chapel stinks. We do not like it. It is artificial. It is done for a grade and we will do it if we have to, but we want you to know, our new professor, what we think about it. It stinks."

And I said to that class, "Time out. When we gather together in that chapel it is not an artificial situation. We come together to sing and to pray, to read God's Word and to hear the preaching of God's Word and it is a time of worship before God. It is not mock worship. It is a time of worship before God and you men better get it in your heads that that is the case and you had better get it in your heads to approach that time in chapel in that way."

And I am thankful to be able to say we saw a great turn around in those times of worship at the seminary. And I find it fascinating and wonderful that this year as we have gathered together at the seminary for worship in chapel and that little chapel has been packed, the singing has been at times quite astounding because God has been pleased to use those men and women as instruments of his praise and the praise and the singing has been powerful and prophetic. And I submit to you, friends, here in this place, it is exactly the same. Worship is God's using you as instruments for his powerful, prophetic praise.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Work in our midst as your people bought by your blood, refashioned by your power recreated by your Spirit. Use your people now as instruments of your praise we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*