



**Diane Christopher**

**Music in Scripture  
November 10, 2013**

There is an old joke about music in worship that has been online for many years. But there has been an addition to it that I have never heard before. The story goes like this:

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended a big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

“Well,” said the farmer, “It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns.”

“Praise choruses?” asked his wife. “What are those?”

“Oh, they’re o.k. They’re sort of like hymns only different,” said the farmer.

“Well, what’s the difference?” asked the wife.

The farmer said, “Well, it’s like this. If I were to say to you, ‘Martha, the cows are in the corn,’ well, that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you, ‘Martha, Martha, Martha, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, are in the corn, are in the corn, CORN, CORN!!! Oh, yes, it’s true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn. Yes. It’s true. The whole herd is in the awesome corn.’ That would be a praise chorus.”

(Here’s the new part) On the same day, a young man who regularly attended that city church, attended a small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

“Well,” said the young man, “It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs.”

“Hymns?” asked his wife, “What are those?”

“Oh, they’re o.k.. They’re sort of like regular songs, only different,” the young man said.

“Well, what’s the difference?” the wife asked.

The young man said, “Well, it’s like this. If I were to say to you, ‘Martha, the cows are in the corn’, well, that would be a regular song. If on the other hand, I were to say to you,

'Oh, Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry.  
Inclined thine ear to the word of my mouth.  
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by.  
To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth.

For the way of the animals, who can explain?  
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,  
Harkenest, they in God's sun or his rain.  
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced.

Yea, those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight,  
Have broken free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed,  
Then goaded by minion of darkness and night  
They all my wild Chilliwack sweet corn have chewed.

So look to that bright shining day by and by  
Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn  
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry,  
And I no longer see those foul cows in corn. Amen!

Now, this is a hymn.

Well, this is a humorous way to introduce my message this morning. There is a reason why we have music in worship, whether it is a praise chorus or hymn. We are going to do a brief survey of music in scripture. You will notice that there is no scripture listed in our bulletin. That's because there are over 2000 references to music in the Bible and I couldn't narrow it down to just one by the time the bulletin was printed on Friday. But I have picked out a few for us to look at today.

Let's pray before we look at these passages.

Prayer: Holy God, prepare our hearts, we pray, for the reading and the proclamation of your Word. May it challenge us, encourage us, inspire us and convince us. Thank you that your Word is dynamic, life-giving, and always relevant to our lives. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:19-20

This passage is a very clear mandate for corporate worship, and it tells us what to do: to sing and make music to the Lord, and to sing and make music with each other.

All of scripture bears this out.

In the very beginning when the earth was made we are told that "the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy (Job 38:7)

In the fourth chapter of Genesis, you have the first instruments. In the thirty-first chapter of Genesis you have the first choir.. And after that the whole Bible thrills with song.

The Israelites sang when God saved them from their enemies. They sang at feasts and celebrations. The Psalms are songs and are meant to be sung.

King Solomon wrote 1005 songs (I Kings 4:32)

Music was such an important responsibility in the Temple that all those appointed to serve God this way were not allowed to work somewhere else (1 Chronicles 9:33). In other words, musicians made a living by serving God in the temple. So, it is very Biblical that we pay Kay and Fred and Joel to lead us in worship in our sanctuary.

There were 288 of these musician workers in the temple (I Chronicles 25: 7), and scripture calls their work a *ministry* .

David's choir had 4000 participants. (I Chronicles 23:5). And when Israel sang, they did it with all their might using harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets. (I Chronicles 13:8). This was not a quiet worship service! It was one of great joy, noise, and celebration.

There is a scripture passage that reveals how important these musicians were in their work of leading people in worship.

Read I Chronicles 15:16-22

“David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps, cymbals. So the Levites appointed....” and the passage goes on listing the names of those appointed to lead worship with music. Their work is so important that their names are given in the Bible for all to read thousands of years later.

The passage ends by talking about the choir director: “Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing, that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it.” Kay, your position as choir director is honored in scripture.

Worship in scripture was powerful; here is a story of one of my favorites. (II Chronicles 5). King Solomon had built a permanent temple for God, and it was time to move the Ark of the Covenant into the temple. The Ark contained the tablets with the 10 commandments given to Moses by God. These tablets were written by the finger of God.

This is what happened:

7 “The priests brought the ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim....<sup>11</sup> The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place....<sup>12</sup>All the Levites who were musicians – (then the passage names the musicians)– stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.

13 The trumpets and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang;

He is good;

His love endures forever.

Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, <sup>14</sup> and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.”

Music inspired worship, and God shows up in a big way.

When we surround ourselves with music that glorifies God we are actively putting ourselves into the very presence of God.

There is another way music is used in scripture. It is used in difficult situations. King Saul eventually stopped walking with God, and as a result, became a bit insane. The only thing that calmed his soul was when David came and played his harp for Saul. Those of you who are familiar with music therapy understand this.

In the New Testament, when Jesus knew he was facing his arrest and death, he and his disciples sang hymns as they walked to the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the book of Acts (Acts 16:16-34), the Apostle Paul and his traveling companion Silas were arrested for talking about Jesus. They were stripped and severely beaten, and thrown into prison with their feet in stocks. Guess what they did? They began to sing hymns to God. As a result, the jailer is converted and baptized along with his whole family.

Music to God changes us and our circumstances. So we sing to the Lord.

When we experience death of a loved one, we can sing “It is Well With My Soul.” When we experience great joy at the birth of Jesus, we sing “Joy to the World.” When we meet God in the quiet places, we sing “Father, I adore you, lay my life before you...” When we marvel that our sins are forgiven, we sing “Amazing Grace! How Sweet the sound...” If you are a Sunday School teacher and you want to teach your students profound things in simple ways, you sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so....”

As the Bible begins in song, it ends in song. In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, John has a vision. Heaven opens up and he sees a huge worship service going in heaven (Revelation 5). John records:

“I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain...he came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp...and they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll...’

“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and then ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the lamb, who was slain...’

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!’

The four living creatures said ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.”

It is going to continue on, my friends. We get to keep on singing in heaven.

So, thank you, all of you who have the gift of music – whether it is singing or playing a musical instrument. Thank you for taking that gift and using it to help us worship God. To help us enjoy the presence of God. To help us celebrate. To help us express gratitude to God. To help us pray to God in all our circumstances.

We are indeed blessed to have you all. Amen.

**Blessing** from Ps 40:3 May God put a new song in your mouth, a hymn of praise to our God, so many will see and put trust in the Lord. Go out this day with a song in your heart. Amen.