

Victory!

or

Praise Him: All Creatures

The What, Where, Why, How, and Who of Worship

Psalm 150:1 Praise the LORD!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

Praise him in his mighty heavens!

² Praise him for his mighty deeds;

Praise him for his excellent greatness!

³ Praise him with trumpet sound;

Praise him with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dancing;

Praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise him with sounding cymbals;

Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let all who have breath, praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD!

Psalms 150

And Now

AND NOW THE END IS NEAR

And so we face the final curtain

My friend, I'll say it clear

I'll state my case, of which I'm certain

That's about as much of Frank's swan song that I dare give you here. Well, I suppose I could give you a little more, by changing the "I" to "we": "*We've loved, we've laughed and cried, we had our fill, our share of losing, and now, as tears subside...*" These short parts of the famous crooner's song do reflect to some degree my feelings about coming to the end of the Psalter. Nearly two years, and we've come to the last song.

But while Sinatra goes "*his own way*" in his song, exalting self in the ultimate humanistic refrain, my friend, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case, of which I'm certain: The Psalms are *the anti-humanistic soundtrack*, unless you want to say that they are the songs of One Human, a human who was yet to come, a human who would be born of a virgin and rise from the dead. These songs started with a six-verse song that began with "*the Man*" (*ish*). They end with a six-verse psalm celebrating all that he has done ... *and will do*, for his people.

The cumulative effect is a celebration of the Triune God, especially the victories he has won and will soon win for his people.

Psalm 150

Psalm 150. It has been called “that most pure of all hymns,”¹ “The climax, the grand finale [of the Crescendo],”² and “The last summit of the mountain chain of Psalms, [rising] high into the clear azure, its brow bathed in the sunlight of the eternal world of worship, it is a rapture.”³

It is singular in its theme. A simple, repeated call to praise the LORD. As with the last five songs of the book, it begins and ends with one word: Hallelujah—Praise Yah. The thing is, unlike any other psalm, it repeats this word in every verse.

¹ Tremper Longman III, “From Weeping to Rejoicing: Psalm 150 as the Conclusion to the Psalter,” in Andrew J. Schmutzer & David M. Howard Jr. (eds.), *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (p. 221). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

² Dirk J. Human, “Praise Beyond Words’: Psalm 150as Grand Finale of the Crescendo in the Psalter.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 67:1 (2011): 1 [1-10]. <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/917/1497>.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 120-150*, vol. 6 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 463.

In fact, in just six verses *Hallelu-* appears 13 times. This makes it the densest song of pure praise anywhere in the Bible.

It is **elegant and instructive in its structure**. It forms an *inclusio*. Like bookends, this technique of writing begins and ends with the same idea. As we've seen, each of the last five songs does this. But all of those songs were chiasitic in nature. This one is progressive (like a downward stairstep). That is, it takes you from one question to the next to the next until finally, it has answered all that it can about praising God.

What are those questions? They are the **what**, **where**, **why**, **how**, and **who** of worship. It is difficult for me to think of a better way to end such a book as this.

- A. **What?** Praise the LORD (1a)
- B. **Where?** **In** his sanctuary, in the mighty heavens (1b-c)
- C. **Why?** **For** his mighty acts and excellent greatness (2)
- D. **How?** **With** great instruments (3-5)
- E. **Who?** **Everything** that has breath (6a)
- A¹. Praise the LORD (6b)

Why should we want to ask and know the answers to such questions as these? Because, as we have seen throughout our study, **our chief end is to worship**, to praise. It is why we were created. Indeed, it is why all things were created. As far back as Psalm 100 we thought about *The Doxology* that has been so common in worship services for hundreds of years:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*

And this is what we saw in great detail in Psalms 146-149.

In these songs we have seen that “**I**” am to worship (Ps 146), that “**you**” are to worship (147), that **the creation**—the whole thing—is to worship (148), and that the **church** is to worship (149). Psalm 150 sums all these things up this way: “**Let all who have breath, praise...**” (Ps 150:6).

But as I said, the song answers a series of questions as it comes to this conclusion. It asks **what** we are to praise (vs. **1a**); **where** we are to praise (**1b-1c**); **why** we are to praise (**2**); **how** we are to praise (**3-5**); and concludes with **who** is to do all this praising (**6**). The only question it doesn't address directly is **when** we are to praise, but this comes through indirectly simply in the frequency of occurrences of the word Hallel—on average more than two times a verse, and it can only mean we are to **praise God all the time!**

Put together, as we will see, like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Psalm 150 is a resounding, clashing, banging, blowing, blasting, plucking, continuous coda of glorious praise song. But as Allan Sherman once said, "**a work of art should have an end that's not too short or long,**"⁴ and that's why Psalm 150 is perfect! This, then, is the way the Psalter ends.

⁴ This is a funny one. I was looking up the name of the ending of a symphony, and up came this Allan Sherman song I hadn't heard in 40 years, since my dad had it on record. **Allan Sherman**, "The End of a Symphony" in his *Peter and the Commisar* live album with the Boston Pops.

Kind of.

I have long debated what to do with the following information. There is in fact [another psalm](#) in some Bibles, namely the LXX which all of the Church Father's used. In some ways it's like trying to figure out if you should preach the end of Mark or the first part of John 8, because those passages are not found in many early manuscripts. Because most Protestant Bibles put those passages in, I would and have preached them as Scripture. Because virtually no Protestant Bible puts Psalm 151 in, I won't preach it. (Curiously, neither did Theodoret or Augustine, though they preached all the other psalms). But I do want you to be made aware of it and of a handful of other psalms that were found at the Dead Sea.

Psalm 151 purports to be a Psalm of David. We have fairly good copies of it both in the Greek and from the Dead Sea Scrolls:⁵

⁵ The Scrolls also turned up four other psalms that we did not have before, now called psalms 152-155.

Psalm 151 in the LXX and Dead Sea Scrolls ⁶				
LXX (Greek)	151A 11QPs ^a (Hebrew)	151B 11QPs ^a (Hebrew)	151A 5ApocSyrPs 1a (Syriac)	151B 55ApocSyrPs 1b (Syriac)
1 <i>This Psalm is autobiographical. Regarding David and outside the number. [When he fought Goliath in single combat.]</i>	1 <i>Hallelujah of David the son of Jesse.</i>	1 <i>At the Beginning of [Dav]id's Po[w]er After the Prophet of God Anointed Him</i>	1 <i>By David, When He Alone Fought Against Goliath</i>	
I was small among my brothers and the youngest in the house of my father; I would shepherd the sheep of my father.	I was the smallest among my brothers, and the youngest among the sons of my father; and he made me shepherd of his flocks, and the ruler over his kids.		I was the smallest of my brothers, and a child of my father's house. I was tending my father's flocks; [and I discovered a lion and a wolf and I killed and rent them.]	
2 My hands made an instrument; my fingers tuned a harp.	2 My hands made a flute, and my fingers a lyre; and I shall render glory to the Lord, I thought within myself.		2 My hands made instruments, and my fingers fashioned lyres.	
	3 The mountains cannot witness to him, nor the hills proclaim (him); the trees have elevated my words, and the flocks my deeds.			
3 And who will report to my lord? The Lord himself, it is he who listens.	4 For who can proclaim and who can announce, and who can recount the deeds of the Lord? Everything God has seen, everything he has heard and he has listened.		3 And who will declare my Lord; that is the Lord; that is my God?	
4 It was he who sent his messenger and took me from the sheep of my father and anointed me with the oil of his anointing.	5 He sent his prophet to anoint me, Samuel to make me great;		4 He sent his angel; and removed me from the sheep of my father; and anointed me with the ointment of his anointing.	
5 My brothers were handsome and tall, and the Lord did not take delight in them.	my brothers went out to meet him, handsome of figure and handsome of appearance. 6 (Although) their stature was tall, (and) their hair handsome, the Lord God did not choose them.		5 My brothers were handsome and majestic; but the Lord did not choose them.	
	7 <i>But he sent and took me from behind the flock, and he anointed me with holy oil, and he made me leader for his people, and ruler over the sons of his covenant.</i>			
6 I went out to meet the allophyle [Philistine], and he cursed me by his idols.		Then I s[a]w a Philistine who was uttering taunts from the ra[n]ks of the enemy ...]		I went out to attack the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols.
7 But I, having drawn the dagger [sword] from him, I beheaded him and removed reproach from Israel's sons.		... I ... the ...		But after I unsheathed his sword, I cut off his head; and I removed the shame from the sons of Israel.

⁶ From **James H. Charlesworth**, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom, and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 2 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 612-15. And **Andrew C. Witt**, "David, the 'Ruler of the Sons of His Covenant': The Expansion of Psalm 151 in 11QPs^a," *JESOT* 3.1 (2014): 77-97. For the other four psalms, see Charlesworth.

I believe the main reason this psalm is not inspired is not because of its content, but because of its placement. It's like they didn't know what to do with it, or they discovered it in a dust, cobweb filled corner of an old room after the Psalter had already been finished. Psalm 150 is clearly the ending of the Psalter.⁷ Psalm 151 completely destroys this ending, not to mention the symmetry of the number of psalms in the Psalter, which as we have seen has been meticulously and deliberately shaped into this form, I believe not only by a scribe like Ezra, but by the Holy Spirit himself.⁸

⁷ I should probably have put "clearly" in quotes for one curious reason I discovered this week. **Goulder** admittedly "speculatively" points out that some early copyists (Origen) of Acts 13:33 call Psalm 2 "the first psalm [*proto psalmo*]." He states, "There was a second-century tradition that the Psalter began with Psalm 2 ... it looks as if the African churches and Origen knew another form of the Psalter, which ended with our Psalm 1" (**Goulder**, *Psalms of the Return*, 305).

⁸ **Three more points of note here.** **First**, I suppose it could be argued that Psalm 151 acts like a kind of *Epilogue*, which comes after the book as a whole is closed, but it really does seem to defeat the point (see sermon below). **Second**, it shouldn't bother us that David wrote other songs that are not considered Scripture any more than it should bother us that Paul wrote letters that are not Scripture. **Third**, I believe Psalm 151 should be regarded as we regard the Apocrypha, not as "evil literature," but as the Reformer Oecolampadius taught us to view it, "We do not despise [them]; but we do not allow them divine authority with the others." And as Luther said, "These books are not held equal to the Scriptures but are useful and good to read." **Oecolampadius** Cited in *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha: Augmented Third Edition*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6; Martin **Luther**, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word*

This leads me to something very interesting about Psalm 150,

Ps 150 is often connected with *number symbolism*. Most commentators choose the number *ten* as significant and regard it as a possible reference to ten words of creation (in Gen 1), the ten commandments (in Ex 20/Deut 5), or both, or to completeness. *Thirteen* is sometimes seen as a reference to the thirteen attributes of God. Some see *twelve* as referring to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve months of the year. Some also note the occurrences of *seven* referring to completeness (seven instruments in vv. 3-5), or *four* referring to all the earth (four lines in vv. 1-2), and there are further suggestions [italics original].⁹

This scholar notes many contemporary colleagues who think along these lines. But it isn't just contemporaries. This goes all the way back.

and Sacrament I, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 232.

⁹ **Alma Brodersen**, *The End of the Psalter* (Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 34.

What are some of these numbers? First, the number 150 is, at least to Augustine, highly symbolic of the totality of the Testaments of Sabbath, of Jubilee, of resurrection, and of Christ himself. His reasoning is worth hearing:

The fact that they in all amount to one hundred and fifty ... Firstly, the number fifteen ... signifies the agreement of the two Testaments. For in the former is observed the Sabbath, which signifies rest; in the latter the Lord's Day, which signifies resurrection. The Sabbath is the seventh day, but the Lord's Day, coming after the seventh, must needs be the eighth (and is also to be reckoned the first) ... seven and eight make fifteen. Of the same number too are the Psalms which are called "[songs of ascent]."

... Further too, the number fifty in itself also contains a great mystery. For it consists of a week of weeks, with the addition of one as an eighth to complete the number of fifty. For seven times seven make forty-nine, whereto one is added to make fifty. And this number fifty is of so great meaning, that it was after the

completion of that number of days from the Lord's Resurrection, that, on the fiftieth day exactly, the Holy Spirit came upon those who were gathered together in Christ ... This fifty the number one hundred and fifty contains three times, as though it were multiplied by the Trinity. Wherefore for this reason too we make out that this number of the Psalm is not unsuitable.¹⁰

Within the psalm itself, we have: 3 is number of times “Yah” appears. Symbolic of the Trinity? 4 is the kind of instruments used (“wind, string, and percussion [and voice]),¹¹ symbolic of creation?¹² 7 is the number of different instruments used (trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, strings, pipe, cymbals), 8 if cymbals is counted twice (thus 7+8= 15). 10 is the number of “Praise him” com-

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms: Psalm 150*.

¹¹ Longman III, “From Weeping to Rejoicing,” 223.

¹² This is Bullinger's take on the number. E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, fourth Ed. Revised (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., 1921).

mands in the body of the song. 12 is the total number of “praise him” commands.¹³ 13 is the total number of Hallelujah’s in the song. In other words, this last song is loaded with symbolism, in much the same way the last book of the Bible is.¹⁴ This was a common teaching method used by the Jews, for anyone wanting to think more deeply about the subject. With these things now in mind, let’s turn to the last six verses of the Psalms—Psalm 150.

What? The Object of Worship

The song, **anonymous**, but perhaps written by the same hand as others in this five-song set, begins “**Praise the LORD**” (**Ps 150:1, 6**). “LORD” here

¹³ “In unison with the three-number of the strophes stands the use three times of Jah. The הללו, praise, occurs twelve times; the instruments of the praise of God are ten, three in ver. 3, four in ver. 4, three in ver. 5, 6.” E. W. Hengstenberg, John Thomson, and Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 555. Alma Brodersen writes, “The only verb in Ps 150, הלל ‘praise’, is used 12 times in a piel imperative plural masculine (twice in the frame, twice each in vv. 1-5) and once in a piel jussive singular feminine (v. 6).” Alma Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter* (Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 31-32.

¹⁴ This “unspoken” language of numbers is the point of **Human**’s article (see n. 2 above).

is the shorted form of Yahweh, the word Yah. *Hallelu-Yah*. In the next part of the verse, he is called El (*hallelu-El*). This gives us the “what” of worship, or to put it another way, the object of worship. But one last time, who is this God?

It is interesting that the LXX simply transliterates the first *hallelu* as *allelouia*. The next *hallel*, however, becomes *aineite ton theon* (praise God). In the last verse it becomes *ainesato ton kurion* and then back to *allelouia*.

Translating “hallelujah” in Psalm 150 and 117		
Vs.	Hebrew	Greek
Psalm 150:1	hallelu-Yah	<i>allelouia</i>
	hallelu-El	<i>aineite ton theon</i>
Psalm 150:6	te-hallel-Yah	<i>ainesato ton kurion</i>
	hallelu-Yah	<i>allelouia</i>
Psalm 117:1	hallelu’et-Yhwh	<i>Allelouia aineite ton kuroin</i>
Psalm 117:2	hallelu-Yah	<i>allelouia</i>

Why does this matter? Because you move from two words for God in the Hebrew (Yah and El) to three in the Greek: *Yah*, *Theos*, *Kurios*. The last of these is the term that is used all the time for the “Lord” Jesus, including Paul’s citation of “praise the Lord” (**Rom 15:11**), whom he says is Jesus.

Couple this with the three-fold use of *Yah* in the song, and the Triune God seems to be peaking his head above the surface. This Triune God is thus the object of our worship. Thus, the church has sung with Psalm 150 as its backdrop,

ALLELUIA! Song of gladness, Voice of everlasting joy:
Alleluia! Sound the sweetest Heard among the choirs on high ...
Praises with our prayers uniting, Hear us, blessed Trinity;
Bring us to Thy blissful presence, There the Paschal Lamb to see,
There to Thee our Alleluia Singing everlastingly.¹⁵

Where? The Place of Worship

Only after learning the object of worship can you possibly move to [the place of worship](#). [Psalm 150:1](#) continues by telling us the “[where](#)” of worship. “[Praise God in his sanctuary; Praise him in his mighty heavens!](#)” First, [a note on the meaning](#). “[Sanctuary](#)” (*qodesh*) could refer to the earthly or

¹⁵ Charles Vincent, D. J. Wood, and John Stainer, eds., *The Hymnal Companion to the Book of Common Prayer with Accompanying Tunes*, Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged. (London; New York; Bombay; Calcutta: Longmans Green, and Co., 1914), 457.

heavenly sanctuary. But the “mighty heavens” (*raqia*) clearly refers to the heavenly sanctuary.¹⁶ Given that both refer to the place where God is, and given that God is everywhere, but especially present in his sanctuaries, it seems best that it refers to the earthly sanctuary, thus giving us the totality of his presence.

Tremper Longman has some helpful reflections on this. Remembering way back to Psalm 15 we learned that, “One may only enter this sanctuary if one is ritually pure and righteous.”¹⁷ Yet, that psalm is followed immediately by a song that explains through prophecy that those who are pure and righteous must be raised from the dead and justified by God through Christ (see the sermon on those songs). Israel surely sang this from a temple in Jerusalem. But this side of the cross,

¹⁶ Technically, it is the solid dome ([Gen 1:6](#)) above the earth whereupon sits Yahweh’s throne ([Ezek 1:22-26](#)). See [John Goldingay](#), Psalms 90– 150, *BCOTWP* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 747-48.

¹⁷ [Longman III](#), Kindle 225.

With the coming of Christ, holiness no longer is restricted to specific locations like the tabernacle or the temple. We can praise God anywhere in intimate fellowship because ‘the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14). Jesus anticipated the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:1-2) and taught that he would raise it up again in three days, an obvious reference to his resurrection (John 2:19) ... [and when] Jesus ascended to God, he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us (John 14:15-31), making us the very temple of God (1Co 6:19).”¹⁸

Thus, coming after so much prophecy, at the very end of the Psalter, the “where” of worship can be read in light of the coming of Christ, and Psalm 150 is indeed prophetic in this regard. This is seen all the more when you understand the next two sections and their accompanying questions.

¹⁸ Longman, 227-230.

Why? The Reason of Worship

Psalm 150:2 moves us from the what (Triune God) of worship and the where (“in”) of worship to **the why**. This is seen in a change of prepositions from “in” to “for.” “Praise him for his mighty deeds; Praise him for his excellent greatness.”

Throughout the Psalms, and even in these last five songs, we have seen that there are two primary things that his mighty deeds point to: **Creation** and **Redemption**. All of the historical psalms reflect either upon things like Genesis 1 and creation or the Exodus and Conquest. Creating all things from nothing by just a word was seen as recently as Psalm 148. And as recently as Ps 135-136 we had whole songs celebrating the redemptive history of those days of Moses and Joshua. Both of these ideas are paradigmatic of God’s mighty deeds, not only because their voices go out into all the world and the message goes round the world, but because what they declare is the excellent greatness of God.

There is simply no Being like God. In his Essence, he can't even be analogized. You can't compare God to something, for he is incomparable. You can't measure him, for he is everywhere. You can't ever fully explain him, for he is ineffable. You can't picture him, for he is invisible. God is simply totally unique in all the universe. There is nothing like him, certainly not anything in creation, and what else is there besides him and creation? Thus, the oft stated phrase, “Who is like you, O LORD?”

But more personally, that is, to the Persons of the Godhead, something like the Name Michael (who I believe is the Son of God): “Who is Like El: *Mi-Ka-El*.” And this points us to the only way we can possibly know about God, which is through the revelation of him by the Word of God, the perfect image, the exact representation of his Being, and yet one who has become like us.

When you consider why you are to praise this God, you must start with God's revelation of himself to you in the person of **Christ**. Angel, Word,

Name, Glory in the OT. Human but still Word, Name, and Glory in the New. God of covenant. God of law. Yet, not just the past in the OT, but the present in in the NT!

God in human flesh, sent by his **Father**. Father God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. Father God, Hallelu-*El*. Awesome in his Sanctuary. Unapproachable in Light. Yet loving and kind heavenly Father to all those who are brothers of his Son the Lord Jesus through adoption. Approachable through the merits and intercession of Christ.

Christ, with the Father, sending the **Spirit** to come after he left to sit at his Father's right hand, because he had died and been raised to newness of life as the Firstfruits of a new harvest to come. And that Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who dwells within you, whose power and might are unfathomable, yet whose personal interactions create groans that words cannot express. The Spirit who is a guarantee and a down deposit of your future heavenly glory, through the newness of life He has created in you by the power of the Word. All three,

mighty in the heavens. Mighty in deeds. God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity. This is why you worship, for there is nothing and no one that compares anywhere else. These are the “whys” of worship.

How? The Way of Worship

Vs. 3-5 take us to the longest section of the Psalm. It answers in three verses the “how” of worship. It lists **seven instruments**. “Praise him with the trumpet sound; Praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dancing; Praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!” Here we have the all the main groupings of instruments: **brass** (it’s actually an animal horn), **percussion**, **woodwinds**, and **strings**. The totality and fullness of all we have to praise God with are here commanded to be used.

I should probably take a moment to answer some questions. Our church ordinarily does not

have anything but a stringed instrument, and that is a piano, which they didn't have. What should you make of this in our church? I believe it is good and right to praise God with all kinds of instruments, but only if people know how to play them, and only if they are used well and properly in God's worship.

Of course, that leads to some other questions. Things like, what about [dancing](#)? That's here. Why don't we do that? Or how about, why did some of the [Puritans](#) not want any instruments at all if they believed in a regulative principle where we are to worship God as he has commanded.¹⁹

¹⁹ **Going Deeper.** I don't have time to delve into this in the sermon, but it is worth mentioning. I came close to accepting this argument many years ago. I have a good friend whose church practices "Psalms-only" with no instruments in a Presbyterian denomination. His family was never legalistic in my judgment, but the reading I did on this subject felt very much that way.

The basic argument is a rather strange one. It assumes the regulative principle—that we are only to worship as God has commanded. God has not commanded us to worship him with instruments or man-made song, therefore, we are not to use them. Obviously, however, Psalm 150 does command these instruments. The reply is that this was commanded of temple worship and the temple has passed away. Therefore, just like animal sacrifices, unless it is commanded to the church, we are not to use instruments (except the human voice, oh, and a pitch pipe is OK too).

This argument fails in my opinion, and badly. [First](#), there is still a temple in the NT, it has simply changed location and structure. [Second](#), Psalm 150 does say to worship in the "sanctuary," and the NT church is the new sanctuary of

Aren't these commanded to be used here? Or how about what do you mean by playing them **well and properly?**

These are difficult questions that can take a long time to unpack, and I don't have the time or will to do that all here today. But I will say a few words. God's worship is always supposed to be orderly. Too much worship these days is anything but that. It is raucous, rambunctious, uproarious, but not in good ways (see the C. S. Lewis quote at the end of the sermon). But other worship often feels dull, lifeless, even dead, at least emotionally, to many people. All I can say is that the church has worshiped God on both sides of these spectrums,

Christ. **Third**, instrumental musical accompaniment is hardly akin to animal sacrifices. Rather, it is more like a "sacrifice of praise," that is a thank offering. And the NT church is in fact commanded to offer these up (**Heb 13:5**). **Fourth**, instruments are common to culture, they are not special to church. In other words, they belong to the human race, and God gave them to us to help us praise. What has changed in our nature to make is to instruments do not help the totality of a man praise him with his inner, emotional being? **Fifth**, it's always been ironic to me that many of these congregations use a pitch pipe; i.e. an instrument. None of this means you must worship God with instruments, because what if you don't have any near you or anyone that can play them, etc." And there is something profoundly beautiful about a congregation singing acapella. Thus, my opinion is that we should not be legalistic about these kinds of questions, either in forbidding them or demanding them. For this defeats the whole point of praising God with them.

and both sides have been done well and both sides have been abused.

Proper worship, especially with instruments, knows how to use those instruments to accompany and to **shine light upon the Word**, without taking over and becoming its own word. The Levites who played the instruments were not just weekend hacks, but professional musicians, trained in theology. God has allowed his worship to take place in all human cultures, and he has not demanded that any one culture conform to any one form of “circumstances” of worship that are common to all people. In other words, he doesn’t demand a certain decibel level, a certain length of service or song, a necessary content to each particular song (compare Ps 119 to 150 for example), the number of instruments that can or can’t be used at any given time, a certain kind of dance, a reserved culture becoming overly expressive or vice-versa.

God has set limits though. His law will **not allow some forms** of dancing. Wisdom tells us what things will work in a given group. He has himself

commanded elements of worship (preaching, prayer, singing, sacraments, etc.), and those are not to take a back-seat. But he is gracious to us, and one of the things that means is that all Christians should do a better job of both heeding the Word on what is acceptable as well as limiting their judgment against others on things that are personal tastes.

It's [a difficult subject](#), isn't it? It has split many churches. It is one that is easy to get off track quickly. From making music the only part of your "worship" service that is actually considered worship, to turning worship into nothing but a secular rock concert, to being hyper-legalistic, we fail regularly. But God is gracious, and isn't this one of the chief reasons that we are supposed to worship him as the song says?

Curiously, none of these instruments are actually commanded in any weekly celebration of worship, though we will see, they do appear together on one important occasion. But this leads to what is really, I think, [the most important thing to](#)

consider with these instruments. Robert Godfrey wrote an article on Psalm 150 some 20 years ago, which has stuck in my mind since I first read it. He explains some very important things about this part of the Psalm:

We should not look at these instruments as abstractions, as instruments without any background or history or character to them. I do not think we should read this psalm as saying, “If we really want to worship God, we have to have a trumpet, we have to have a tambourine, and we have to have a cymbal or two.”

No, I suspect that the pious Israelite as he heard this psalm read would have thought very much of the occasions on which these instruments were used in the history of God's people. These, instruments are so richly attached to crucial experiences, in Israel's worship and national life that as the people of, God read or sang this psalm, their minds would have gone back to those events.

Think of the trumpets: For the pious Israelite the mind would surely have gone to various solemn religious occasions, the offering of sacrifices at the temple, the day of atonement annually, the great moment of **victory** when the ark was taken up to Jerusalem (**Num 10:10, Lev 25:9, 2Sa 6:15**). At those times the trumpet was sounded. The psalmist's call to praise God with the trumpet would have reminded the people of those powerful acts of the Lord and the greatness of the Lord. They remembered that the trumpet was used to summon them together both for worship and civic meetings (**Num 10:4, 1Kgs 11:34, 39, 41**). It would have reminded them how they were summoned to **go into battle** for the Lord against the enemies of the Lord and to preserve their nation. They would have remembered how the trumpet was sounded at the anointing of their kings (**Josh 6, Jdg 7**). This instrument, you see, would have carried their minds back to all sorts of occasions in which they praised the Lord. Praise Him in His temple. Praise Him under His heavens in all that you do.

Think of the harp and the lyre. These instruments of rejoicing (Gen 31:27) were played at the dedication of the temple, played at the dedication of the new walls of Jerusalem, played sometimes to accompany prophecy and sacrifices, played to celebrate victory in battle (2Chr 5:12, Neh 12:27, 1Sa 10:5, 1Ch. 25:1-6, 2Chr 29:25, 20:28). Again you see the richness of the historical background of these instruments for Israel. Not just sounds raised to praise the Lord, but sounds resounding in the religious and national and **military history** of God's people in all that they did in service to Him in all of their praise.

“Praise him with the tambourine and dance.” Here again we have particularly elements and expressions of joy. Dance is contrasted regularly in the Scripture with mourning. In the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a time to mourn and there is a time to dance (Eccl 3:4). Dance and the tambourine especially recognized those times of happiness, those times of celebrations, those times preeminently of **triumph** (Ps 30:11, Jer 31:4, 13). For in Israel the

tambourine and dance were brought out to celebrate especially **military victory**. We find Miriam dancing and leading the women of Israel in dance and playing the tambourine as they celebrate the drowning of Pharaoh in the Red Sea and the deliverance of the people (**Ex 15:20**). We find repeated references to how the women danced to celebrate the **victories of Saul and David** over the enemies of God (**1Sa 21:11, 29:5, 18:6**). We find the dance at times of the harvest celebration (**Jdg 21:21**). And so the dance was particularly a military and civic affair in the life of Israel's history. The dance is not particularly used in our recorded Scriptures for worship in Israel except at that tragic moment when all of Israel danced before the golden calf (**Ex 32:19**). But in the worship of Jehovah we find no instances of dancing as a regular part of the worship of God...

The strings and the pipes recorded here (or the strings and the flutes as the NIV has it) are also general terms for instruments of rejoicing. The cymbals again are associated with the mov-

ing of the ark and with the sacrifices in the temple (2Sa 6:5, 2Chr 29:25). So we see that these instruments lift not just sound in praise to God, but they lift the whole history of the nation's experience to God in praise.²⁰

Godfrey's analysis is very important, because it helps you **think theologically** about the instruments. Not only theologically, but redemptive-historically. And I believe this is exactly why these instruments are mentioned.

Specifically, there is something that all of these have in common that I want to highlight. And it has to do with the relationship between Psalm 149 and 150. If you recall, last time we saw that Psalm 149 took a drastic and unexpected turn at the end. It started talking about this crazy **warfare imagery** that seemed out-of-place not only to that song, but to this entire collection. Yet, we noted that in

²⁰ W. Robert Godfrey, "What Does It Mean to Praise?: A Look at Psalm 150," in *Modern Reformation Pardon & Praise: Worship Calmly Considered* 5:1 (Jan/Feb 1996): 14-16 [13-16]. At <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/article/what-does-it-mean-to-praise/>.

fact, when understood properly, this warfare imagery is what the entire song was alluding to.

It ended up being a prophetic psalm, in some ways being the mirror image and fulfillment of Psalm 2.²¹ The thing is, each of these instruments has this warfare theme, not merely as a side-note to their meaning, but actually front and center to their biblical-theological use in the Scriptures. Godfrey, in fact, pointed this out explicitly, and

²¹ **Going Deeper: Psalm 150 and Psalm 1.** It is worth noting that Psalm 150 has a similar relationship with Psalm 1. Human writes, “It is important to reflect for a moment on the relationship of Psalm 150 to Psalm 1 and to the rest of the Psalter, in order to discover some nuances on the concept of ‘praise’. The canonical and redaction-historical approaches to reading the psalms require a comparison of these perspectives. Both Psalm 1 and 150 are ‘corner’ psalms [*Eckpsalmen*]; the one to introduce and the other to conclude the *Psalter*. In Psalm 1 the individual is addressed and the importance of the Torah is emphasised for the joyful and happy life in the community of Yahweh believers. Psalm 150 is a universal call on all that breathes to praise the same God vigorously. As fifth psalm of the final *Hallel* and of Book V, Psalm 150 extends ten imperative summonses for praise, a feature which attributes a Decalogue and Torah character to the psalm. Both psalms thus frame the *Psalter* with the *theolegomenon* of the Torah. Inevitably ‘praise’ in Psalm 150 is coloured by this Torah character. In a life of faith, the Torah-obedience visualised in Psalm 1 is thus embedded in the execution of praising Yahweh (of Ps 150), whatever means this praise assumes. Praise in various forms is thus a way to concretise and realise Torah-obedience. This lyric includes obedience and is not transcending, superseding, or overcoming it.” **Human**, 8.

I'm pretty sure he wasn't even thinking about this the way we are now.

The place where this comes together is in 2 Samuel 6 and the bringing of the ark up to Jerusalem. The scene is one of a great military victory over the Philistines, and now, the King of Israel—The Second Person Himself, is ascending his Holy Hill on his Ark-Throne to take his long due rest, all to the celebration of David and the people. And we read, “And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets [perhaps a rattle] and cymbals ... So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn” (2Sa 6:5, 15).

To put this another way, Psalm 150 seems to be deliberately harkening back to that triumphant moment in the life of David, when his Lord Adonai was enthroned in Jerusalem. But read prophetically, Psalm 150 then takes our minds forward in

time to the NT and the great military victory he won at the cross.

“This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col 2:14-15). “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but ... says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”’” (Acts 2:34-35). “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). So, “Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession” (2Co 2:14).

When seen this way, letting all the Scriptures add their voices to this song, suddenly, this “how” actually continues to answer the “why,” and what a story they do tell. We worship the Lord in these ways because he is **the King** who has won himself **a Kingdom**, is now ruling through his church, and is soon coming to return for her. And in his sanctuary, the instruments praise him loudly. The King has Returned. He has given us his very

Spirit. He is coming back soon to assume his final victory over sin, and death, and the devil. Hallelujah. He is coming soon.

Who? Those Who Must Worship

All this can do is lead us to the end of the song and the end of the Psalter. It tells us the who of worship. Who must worship? “Let all who have breath, praise the LORD” (Ps 150:6). Why? Because they are still living. Because he gives them their breath and infuses life by his Spirit. If you are only living by breathing the air he gave you into the lungs he fashioned for you, then please, you must turn to the LORD and praise him now, while you still have this life. For in the life to come, there is only a second death for those who are conquered but refuse to swear fealty to this Suffering Servant who so kindly came that you might have life.

Hear these words of the psalmist and come to life. Become one of a mighty army of dry bones

who have had new life infused into them by the Almighty Word of God, who has conquered and is coming to conquer. Know the goodness of obedience and the answers to suffering. Know the kindness of God's covenant love and the delights of forgiveness. Know the power of salvation and the joys of eternity.

And with that, and with the Psalmist, may all who have breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

An Interesting quote from C. S. Lewis:

I have rather—though the expression may seem harsh to some—called this the “appetite for God” than “the love of God.” The “love of God” too easily suggests the word “spiritual” in all those negative or restrictive senses which it has unhappily acquired. These old poets do not seem to think that they are meritorious or pious for having such feelings; nor, on the other hand, that they are privileged in being given the

grace to have them. They are at once less priggish about it than the worst of us and less humble— one might almost say, less surprised— than the best of us. It has all the cheerful spontaneity of a natural, even a physical, desire. It is gay and jocund. They are glad and rejoice (Ps 9:2). Their fingers itch for the harp (43:4), for the lute and the harp—wake up, lute and harp!— (57:9); let's have a song, bring the tambourine, bring the “merry harp with the lute;” we're going to sing merrily and make a cheerful noise (81:1, 2). Noise, you may well say. Mere music is not enough. Let everyone, even the benighted gentiles, clap their hands (47:1). Let us have clashing cymbals, not only well tuned, but loud, and dances too (150:5). Let even the remote islands (all islands were remote, for the Jews were no sailors) share the exultation (97:7).

I am not saying that this gusto— if you like, this rowdiness—can or should be revived. Some of it cannot be revived because it is not dead but with us still. It would be idle to pretend that we Anglicans are a striking example.

The Romans, the Orthodox, and the Salvation Army all, I think, have retained more of it than we. We have a terrible concern about good taste. Yet even we can still exult. All Christians know something the Jews did not know about what it “cost to redeem their souls.” Our life as Christians begins by being baptised into a death; our most joyous festivals begin with, and centre upon, the broken body and the shed blood. There is thus a tragic depth in our worship which Judaism lacked. Our joy has to be the sort of joy which can coexist with that; there is for us a spiritual counterpoint where they had simple melody. But this does not in the least cancel the delighted debt which I, for one, feel that I owe to the most jocund Psalms. There, despite the presence of elements we should now find it hard to regard as religious at all, and the absence of elements which some might think essential to religion, I find an experience fully God-centred, asking of God no gift more urgently than His presence, the gift of Himself, joyous to the highest degree, and unmistakably real. What I see (so to speak) in the

faces of these old poets tells me more about the God whom they and we adore. But this characteristically Hebraic delight or gusto finds also another channel. We must follow it in the next chapter.²²

²² C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1958), 51-53.