

MU502
The Theology and Practice of Music in the Context of
Worship
Research Paper
*In what ways can the Old Testament be profitably
used to facilitate a ministry of music in worship
today?*

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1. Introduction

My favorite topic in my studies has always been the Old Testament because of its richness of material that cover almost all areas of life. This richness makes the Old Testament especially fit for use in worship.

The paper presented here surveys ways in which one can tap into the fullness of material available but is surely in no way a complete treatment of the subject. I first thought about restricting the topic to the Psalms only but then I would bypass a lot of narrative material. I am convinced that the Psalms have to be seen in the historical context of the Old Testament. Isolating them from their foundations in the life and worship of the Hebrew people makes it hard to comprehend the fullness of the meaning of the Psalms.

Therefore I will look at the whole message of the Old Testament and show how much it is worth for our worship and how it can and is implemented in our worship.

The topic -- as given -- indicates that the use of the Old Testament for worship is optional. Yet the Old Testament has been used at all times in the history of the church in worship and there is no worship without using at least foundational concepts from the Old Testament. The more conscious use of the Old Testament in worship will enhance the quality and liveliness of our worship.

2. Overview of Old Testament Worship

Old Testament music is naturally rooted in the cultural setting of the Old Testament. We therefore look at the music and thought prevalent in the middle East (Egypt, Mesopotamia and Palestine) in the period 2000 - 200 BC. In contrast to our time the worldview was much more holistic. Worship is not separate from other aspects of faith but is an integral part of it. Worship is connected with ethical beliefs and behavior, attitudes and activity. Worship is a lifestyle. Rejecting the ethical teachings and behaving in a way not consistent with faith makes worship worthless as expressed numerous times by the prophets of the Old Testament¹.

That is the reason why the law is so important in the Old Testament. The law -- as brought to the Israelites by Moses -- is the source of knowledge about God's wishes about how a person should live a life worthy of him. A life for him who can only be approached by following *the* way that he himself opened for us to make it possible for us to approach him, the Holy One who created us².

Therefore praise and worship are the ultimate expression of a life devoted to him. Praise and worship are at the heart of the religion of the Old Testament. Praise and worship were frequently festivals for the people. The year of the Israelites was full of festivals (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Festival of Weeks ...) and moreover each seventh year was fully dedicated as a sabbatical year to praise and worship. To engage in these activities the Israelites often had to forfeit material gain that they could have had through work in this time. Would we have the same focus in our time and focus on the joy of worship that God wants to give us in our time! Life was going on in a specific rhythm

¹Peterson p.7

²Peterson p.35

throughout the year that included periods of activity, periods of rest and periods of feasting that lasted for days³.

Music was very rhythmical although in a sharply different way than our current system of meter. Rhythm was shaped by "verbal discourse". There was a deep connection between singing and dancing in rhythmical movements. Ancient Egyptian paintings suggest that the rhythm was clapped with the hands. The word for "singing" in ancient Egyptians means etymologically "to play with the hand" giving witness to a deep connection between music and movements⁴.

Old Testament worship was often not strictly planned like our worship today but much more a spontaneous reaction to events⁵ as for example seen in the Song of Moses when the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea (Exodus 15). There was no stifling form of worship as now often imposed by our written music and the demands of conformity by our churches. Saul found that he worshipped God in ecstasy when the Holy Spirit came on him. He was free to worship. Worship did not mean a controlled act of adoration but the uncontrolled act of God's presence in a person. Saul was seen as an "impersonation of the supernatural" in his ecstasy⁶.

Music was in wide use in the Old Testament as a kind of natural activity belonging to everyday life. Not only was worship expressed by ethical people but also worship had an ethical function. The prophets criticized music done with the wrong intentions and communicating the wrong values⁷. Music assisted in religious ritual and religious dance. It was seen as a link in an incomprehensible language to the supernatural. The entertainment purpose of music was secondary to the exercise of worship⁸.

It should not be assumed that music and worship as found in the cultures of the ancient Near East was primitive. Quite to the contrary. A large selection of instruments has been found. They had professional musicians. Egyptian pictures depict musicians playing together. To judge from the concern for detail with which parts of the Old Testament (for example the acrostic Psalms) were constructed, one can deduce that the music was done in the same meticulous way. The music must have been brilliant like the text was. The Near East was a culturally well developed area in that period⁹.

Haik-Ventura claims that she found out an ancient musical notation using gestures in Egyptian pictures. A method of communicating music very different from our way of conserving music. She sees the cantillation signs of the Masoretic text as a notation of these gestures and claims to be able to reconstruct the melodies used in the Old Testament. Hearing the resultant melodies she claims to be able to discern the characteristics of David and Solomon as composers.

³LHB p. 523

⁴Polin XXI, p.35

⁵Johansson p. 19 I am not sure if I can let it stand like that. Mose might have had some time beforehand to prepare his lyrics there. In any case the song here was a response to a concrete situation.

⁶Routley p.3/1

⁷Routley p.6/9

⁸Nettl Music in primitive culture p.7

⁹Haik-Ventura p. 22

May that be true or not the historical knowledge that we have, especially of the ancient Near Eastern countries, suggests that these cultures had highly developed musical skill that were used to express worship to their respective gods. Israel was within these cultures and therefore used the same capabilities that the others had available in the worship of their God.

3. Time

Time is an important concept in Hebrew thought. Time gives purpose by showing the origin and the aim of the history of God in relating to his people. In other cultures like the Far East time is often seen as cyclical and infinite. Hebrew culture also viewed time as cyclical yet at the same time progressing. The promise to Abraham and his heirs is repeated again and again and God is intervening again and again. The promise is realized first in Isaac, then in the sons of Jacob. It is progressing and expanding. Hebrew time is therefore not strictly cyclical and neither linear but a kind of expanding spiral. The outermost spirals get bigger and bigger until the call goes out to all humanity in Jesus Christ¹⁰.

Our life and worship works in the same way. We have actual worship services at regular intervals when we attend the Sunday service. Yet this participation in worship is designed to bring us further in our pilgrimage of faith and to prepare us for the coming and already partially realized kingdom of God.

The cycle and the progress is again found within a worship service. Each song that is sung is a unit for itself but the songs and other elements that we have in the service do not stand on their own. They go somewhere and should lead the service into a direction. They are in effect a small picture of the history of the God's creation with a *Beginning*, a *Story* and an *End*.

3.1. The Beginning: Creation

One of the central themes of the Old Testament is God's creation. A large part of the Psalms and Hymns focus on this topic praising him for what he has created for us (Psalm 8; 19; 29; 33). The structure of Genesis 1 has also a strongly structured hymnal form¹¹ which leads to the assumption that the very first description of creation in the Bible is already a praise for it. Therefore this kind of praise must be and has been included in all worship in all times of the history of the church.

Creation defines who we are and who the God is that we worship. Naturally this is frequently the topic of songs. We worship the God that has created the heavens and the earth and that is therefore able to work with the elements of this world. Not the elements of this world are the main determination of where we are going. No, not the environment but it is him speaking through his word and his creation to us.

It is the God that has created us in his image as male and female each in his distinctive role in life. This is the topic of our worship to praise him for the way in which he has made us for the richness of life that was given to us. The praise and worship that

¹⁰Lecture notes Spring 1992, OT521 John McKenna [The Prophet Amos](#)

¹¹LHB p. 70

we give unto him are one of reasons for our existence. We are made for the praise of God (Psalm 22:23; Dt 8:10).

Giving thanks to him is the characteristic of the one who is loving God. Not thanking him for what he has created is the beginning of sin and will ultimately lead into being given up by God (Ne 9:26; Dt 32:6; Ro 1:21-26). The worship of God for his creation is the basic testing ground for faith.

Creation is essential for our worship. It defines the basic concept of worship. Ever since Einstein had to revise his equations in his Theory of Relativity¹² even science has to acknowledge that the world must have had a beginning. We as Christians claim to worship him who started it all.

3.2. The Story: God and his people

The Old Testament contains a huge amount of narrative material. The stories show how people interacted with God. The New Testament is more oriented toward theology whereas the Old Testament is giving evidence how people over a long time have related to the God that we worship.

The story of the Old Testament is concerning with the presence of God among his people which is both a reason to fear and something to desire. It is reason to fear because God is holy and will judge the sins of the people. Isaiah feared God because he saw himself as unclean and unworthy when he saw the vision of God's throne (Isa 6:5). Isaiah clearly saw his own sinfulness. But God was merciful and cleansed him from his sin so that Isaiah could endure the presence of the Holy God (Isa 6:7). Isaiah was then ready to accept God's commission to be a prophet to the people of Israel.

The Old Testament is full of these motifs. There is on the one hand God's judgment of sin, but on the other hand forgiveness for the people if they repent of their evil ways. The Israelites are always moving back and forth between these two conditions.

In Dt 28 this is spelled out in great detail and vivid imagery. In the same way we need a balance between mercy and our consciousness of sin in our services. If we focus too much on the mercy of God, we will lose the message from God since we are essentially saying that it does not matter what you do, God will accept you anyway. The will of God is expressed in his commandments which also have their place in worship since they are the will of God for our life as already expressed before. Yet we often do not live according to them and only focusing on the fulfillment of commandments makes faith to empty legalism. The message is lost since there are just empty rules. God's willingness to accept the repentant sinner must also be communicated.

We are the ones facing God (The "presence of God" in Hebrew means literally "before the face of God"). God is willing and ready to communicate with us. He will intervene in our life and is the ultimate director of our life.

Worship needs to express exactly that: *God's will* and *God's mercy*, *God's intervention* here on earth and his willingness to *communicate* with us.

¹²Paul K. Jewett God, Creation & Revelation Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans p. 472-

3.3. The Future: Prophecy

Prophecy and its fulfillment is a sign of God's presence among his people. Prophecy in the Old Testament is not only telling what God will do in the future but most importantly preaching about God, communicating the will of God and spreading the news of his purposes for the people of God. Prophecy is the presence of the voice of God among the people to the effect that the people will make their life decisions according to God's will, so that God's will for the future will be realized.

Prophecy and its fulfillment in history is also proof for the reliability and the presence of God (Ps 99:6-9).

Music can be prophetic in the same way since it expresses the will of God. The most prominent example for such a song is Psalm 119. It preaches about the will of God and therefore moves the hearer to do God's will. It is prophetic in that it expects blessings for those who do God's will (evident already in verse 1 and 2). It is again prophetic in the expectation of judgment for the wrongdoers (verse 84-87)¹³.

The prophets themselves frequently used hymns to express their vision. Amos is most prominent in the use of them. It seems that the whole book is build out of hymnal passages which suggests that his devastating prophecy was communicated using songs.

It is noticeable that our contemporary songs are mostly praise songs and not prophetic in this way. They lack a clear message like most of our churches lack a clear message to the world. We need more prophetic songs, we need vision expressed in songs. Visions and prophetic elements will allow us to move our congregation ahead through the worship. Or are we not ready anymore to face the holy will of God for our life and that of our fellow church member?

3.4. The End: Eschatology

The eschatology of the Old Testament is not so evident as in the New Testament. But there is the general expectation of a messianic age after the fall of Samaria. Amos expects the end of time in a messianic age with the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel in an ideal environment (Amos 9). The "Day of the Lord" is expected, a day that is both a day of darkness for some and of salvation for others¹⁴.

The common theme of all these expectations is that God's Kingdom will finally come and that all the unrighteousness will pass away. God's righteousness will finally reign in person of the messianic King (Isa 11:2-4) and even the natural order of predator and victim will be abolished (Isa 11:6-9)¹⁵.

The kind of vision established by the Old Testament is almost totally congruent with the eschatology of the New Testament. As New Testament eschatology is presented in Revelation by means of song or hymnal material (Rev 12:1-12) so also is the Old Testament eschatology presented in this fashion (see for example Zeph 3:8-9).

¹³See also Peterson p.45. The problem with Peterson's treatment of the subject is that he takes too much space to talk about wrong concepts of prophecy rather than what it exactly is and how it functions in worship.

¹⁴LHB p.398

¹⁵LHB p.401

As evident from Revelation this material was especially frequently used during persecution. Eschatology opens our eye to the future fulfillment of God's promises and makes us rejoice about the inevitable coming of the "Day of the Lord".

These expectations therefore should also be one of our major emphasis in worship. Songs about the future Kingdom let us rise above our current circumstance and open our eyes for the purposes of God.

We must also communicate not only the "Day of Salvation" but also the "Day of Darkness" for sinners, if our message should be authentic. As in the New Testament there will be a time of glorification but not for the ones that do not belong to God. In our age of inclusiveness this is often put under the carpet.

4. Thought

The art of thinking in the Old Testament is markedly different from the thought prevalent during New Testament times and even more different from our way of thinking today. Thought in the Old Testament was largely expressed in story and not in dogma. The form of story is in the proper way that our memory is capable of holding and storing information. The presentation of God in story is therefore especially powerful for communication about God.

4.1. Life as a whole

The Old Testament does not treat life as dissectable into areas. Particular areas of life are not analyzed separately like it is fashionable today. Hebrew people had a notion of life as a whole and what they did expressed their holistic attitude towards life. Music in a similar way was nothing separate from life but an integral part of life. The effects of music on the whole person were well known as becomes evident when David is called to play for Saul on the lyre because of Saul's "evil spirit" that was troubling him (1 Sam 16:15-23).

Because of the "evil spirit" Saul was also suffering bodily, he felt "tormented" (1 Sam 16:23). There was no strong dichotomy between the spiritual and the worldly. Both were seen as integrated and as closely related. Praise to God was a powerful spiritual weapon and at the same time an action done and expressed in this world. Music is something that expresses a strong link between the supernatural and the world of our senses¹⁶.

This link works in both ways. Here David used music to have a spiritual effect on Saul. The prophets are communicating using music because of the spiritual presence of the Lord in them. In Ezekiel 7 the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Ezekiel and he starts to preach the words of the Lord in a hymnal fashion which again suggests that these parts were sung.

Worshipping God has not only effects in this world but also supernatural effects that we cannot know of. The potential effect of music in our congregation is often not

¹⁶Nettl Primitive Cultures p.7 and p. 29 Nettl suggests that Music helps to organize abstract thoughts. Music is therefore not only a spiritual influence but also has an influence on the mind.

realized. The Old Testament allows us to tap into the insight that former generations had in a time when thought was not as fragmentary as today¹⁷.

The New Testament in itself is not as holistic as the Old Testament. The Pharisees had already introduced a dogmatic system that demanded obedience to rules but had no regard for attitudes and inner feelings of the people. It was a legalistic system and of necessity lead to a separation between outward obedience and inward faith. This dualism was one of Jesus greatest problems when he tried to preach to people. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5) includes special treatment on these issues and tries to show that a greater integration between inward thoughts (the heart) and outward deeds is necessary.

Along the same lines worship needs to connect to our heart and not only to our mind. Worship should be an expression of our faith with mind, heart and soul, an expression of the whole person and as a result worship affecting the whole person and through the individual the whole community of believers.

4.2. Concepts of God's presence

God reveals himself as "I am who I am" to Mose in Exodus. God is therefore referred to as YAHWEH ("He is"). The importance for the Hebrews was the presence of God. It was Gods presence in the cloud that led them out of Egypt. It was God's presence in the Tabernacle that was the center of worship in the premonarchial period. And it was God's presence in the Temple that made Jerusalem the center of the Hebrew cult in the monarchial period¹⁸.

God is revealing himself at different points of the history of the Old Testaments in different ways to people and is then retreating again. God presence is connected with certain places and instruments like in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem.

Localizing worship can also help our congregations to be "in tune" with worship when they are in certain places since usually human associate places with specific action done there. The most prominent place associated with worship is naturally our place of meeting, preaching and worship. This will usually be the place associated with encounters of God and at the same time it will be the place where our music will be used to effectively communicate or present the presence of the one who is the "I am".

God is not the one who is distant but he is accessible to people through prayer. Localizing a place where God is present like in the place of meeting can be helpful to introduce people to the presence of God that is usually first experienced in communal worship. The worshippers will grow in this experience and afterwards God's presence can be experienced separated from this place. Israel had to learn that the hard way when the Temple, the place commonly seen as where God was present, was destroyed (2 Chr 36). But they experienced God as present even in exile afterwards (See the book of Daniel) and the fixation on one worship place in Jerusalem was removed.

4.3. The Covenant

¹⁷Peterson p. 37

¹⁸Groezinger p.56

Central to the understanding of the Hebrews of themselves and of God is the idea of covenant¹⁹. Covenants were customary in the period of the Old Testament and the central focus of the Pentateuch is on the covenant established between Israel and Yahweh (Exodus 19-). Blood was sprinkled as a confirmation of the covenant. Research done in the early part of our century has shown that this form of Covenant is almost completely congruent with the way covenants were established between kings and their vassals. These political covenants were a way of governing an empire for a "Great King" and included regulations of the relationship between the superior and the "Small King". The covenant was granted by the "Great King" to the "Small King". The assumption of the covenant was naturally the exclusive loyalty of the "Small King" to the "Great King". It usually included several regulations like the regular public reading of the covenant and the regular appearance before the "Great King".

The analogy to political covenant suggests that the covenant was seen in the same way by the Hebrews. God is the superior Lord and King (the title is frequently used in the Psalms!) over his people and in this covenant he regulates the well being of his people. God is taking up responsibility for the Hebrews and at the same time the Hebrews promise loyalty to him. The covenant was exclusive. No other allegiances to other gods were permitted.

Yahweh is the benevolent patron of the Hebrew people and the people are subjected to him.

From these covenantal principles and titles we get a lot of the titles of God that are frequently used in contemporary worship to express our subjection to him and to express God's sovereignty over all the world. They are foundational to detail us as being a subject of God in worship and life.

4.4. Foreign Cultures

As seen from the adoption of the covenantal forms from the surrounding cultures, the Old Testament is highly influenced by the environment of other cultures. Knowledge of other Worldviews becomes evident from the first page of the Old Testament onwards when the story of creation in Genesis 1 polemicizes against the animism of the day and attributes all that is created exclusively to Elohim, the most high God. This theme runs throughout the Old Testament with the prophets taking over the same theme, witnessing a constant struggle over the tendency to compromise the loyalty to God with the worship of idols or other animistic practices.

At the same time the Old Testament is free to adopt material and change material from the surrounding cultures for its own purposes. Sometimes it seems to be almost a cynical contrapoint established on the basis of common beliefs. One example is Psalm 29 which contains material illustrating a thunderstorm. In the surrounding cultures natural terrifying phenomena were often attributed to divine wrath of some God (for example in the Greek culture Zeus was throwing arrows of fire that caused the thunder and flash in the weather). Psalm 29 asserts in verse after verse the sovereignty of the Lord over the storm as evident. The storm is an illustration of the strength of the God of Israel and

¹⁹Delbert R. Hillers COVENANT Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1969

ultimately also an item of worship of the all powerful Yahweh. Instead of the fear of God the storm in this view builds trust in God who is faithful to Israel and here demonstrates his strength. This must have been an effective song to challenge the beliefs of the surrounding culture.

More evidence is present in the proverbs. Proverbs were apparently seen to be more neutral than songs and consequently more parallelism is evident here than in the Psalms. Most notable are the *Words of the Wise* found in Proverbs 22:17-23:11. They have a very strong parallelism with the Egyptian proverbs of Pharaoh Amenemope dated around 1000 BC²⁰.

A lot of trading of wisdom in the form of proverbs seem to have been commonplace in the ancient near East since proverbs from Mesopotamia can be found in Egypt and in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrews were not hesitant to take over cultural material that fit their purposes.

In fact it seems that taking material from the surrounding culture and reworking it for their own purposes is very effective. Martin Luther did the same during the Reformation by taking songs sung in pubs and adopting them to spread his message reforming the church. This is a successful pattern to make music communicate in a culture. Sadly we have no means of finding out how the Hebrews adapted foreign melodies to their purposes, but it can be inferred that they were treated in the same way as the lyrics. The point here is that we do not establish a totally foreign counterculture with our worship, but we need to have some way to connect to people in the surrounding culture. Worship gets ineffective if separated from contemporary musical expression as witnessed by dead churches that still cling to their old hymnbook in contrast to vividly alive churches that use a more or less contemporized worship style. At the same time we have to guard ourselves that the message that we try to communicate is not distorted or given up (See again Psalm 29 for a good example)²¹.

5. Expression

The Old Testament is full of concrete examples of expressions of worship. These examples can be a great resource for our worship today in their variety of styles and forms. Most commonly known among these are the Psalms, but worship is also expressed in Hymns throughout the Old Testament, in stories that are told and illustrations that are given. The Old Testament can still be a resource for contemporary worship if we open our eyes and see what really is there. To gain access to rhythm and rhyme of the poetry a knowledge of the Hebrew language is necessary. This hurdle alone might bar many people from gaining access to the rich expressions and forms offered.

5.1. Psalms

The Psalms show evidence of a large variety of styles employed. They are a witness to the expression of worship of the Hebrew people and are therefore evidence for a broad perspective on worship songs. Among the most notable structural features are:

²⁰LHB p. 555

²¹Johansson p. 50 "Creative Counterpoint"

5.1.1. Acrosticism

Some of the Psalms (Psalm 119 for example) are organized according to the Hebrew alphabet. The alphabet is a simple device to memorize verses of a song. It is remarkable how simple this way of organizing is. Have we ever used the potential of this method in our worship? The alphabet is taught to little children, so it should be evident to everyone what kind of approach is used here.

5.1.2. Repetition

Repetition is a very common feature of our modern popular songs again (See for example a contemporary song of Graham Kendrick "Jesus put this song into our hearts"). Older Hymns generally avoid repetition except for the Refrain. The variety of repetition presented in the Psalter is tremendous. Some examples of repetition:

- Psalm 136 has this constant repetition hammering in the "steadfast love" of God.
- Psalm 135 "Oh house of Israel ... Oh house of Aaron... O house of Levi"
- Psalm 150 "Praise him Praise him ... Praise ..."

Current trends in contemporary Christian music have resurrected these repetitive elements. The criticism that is leveled against this music because of its simplicity and repetitiveness is unwarranted since it is congruent with the biblical style evident from the Psalms.

5.1.3. Rhyme and Rhythm

Rhyming in the Hebrew language is distinctly different from the kind we are used to. Hebrew likes to play on the sounds of language. Alliteration is common. Words begin with the same sounds. Frequently the same sounds are used in a group of words. This kind of making connection between important words gives the Hebrew a characteristically beautiful style²².

Rhyming has to a certain extent been used in modern Christian song. Our kind of rhyme is concerned with whole phrases. In contrast Hebrew uses a kind of micro-rhyme in neighboring words. Could this be utilized to put emphasis into the words of our songs?

The rhythm utilized is bound to the verbal expression and not so much to the meter as our current musical system is. There are some tendencies in modern praise music that more or less break the system of meter. For example the "Make Way" Series of Graham Kendrick has some elements that move more to focus on verbal expression than on strict meter²³.

Could this revive our worship by getting away from our ever repeated 3 or 4 beat music to something new and at the same time old? The current popular fascination with Gregorian Chant seems to indicate an interest in this direction.

²²LHB p. 316. I could not find any data on rhyme and strong rhythm. It is hardly conceivable that there was no rhythm or rhyme in this culture since the neighboring cultures from Mesopotamia and Egypt have evidence for rhythmical instruments.

²³Haik-Ventura page 249- She discusses in a very detailed way the kind of rhythm that was given to accent certain important words in a hymn.

5.1.4. Parallelism

Another characteristic of the Hebrew poetry. Parallelism means that one sentence is repeated using different words but expressing basically the same idea. Like Psalm 52:3+4:

3 They have all fallen away they are all alike perverse, there is no one who does good, no no one.
4 Have they no knowledge, those evildoers, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?

There are many variation on parallelism especially used in the proverbs²⁴. The Technique here is to work with whole phrases to build close connections that cross the boundaries of the neighboring phrase and give a certain "rhythm" and structure to the flow of phrases in a language. Modifying these structures of phrases and utilizing them in unique ways to communicate is one of the great arts of the Old Testament. This could be a powerful way of communication even in our worship could we revive some of the techniques used here. Modern song has a notable lack of overall structure in comparison with older songs or hymns from the history of the Christian church. Application of these literary devices could add a certain spice to our worship.

5.1.5. Chiasm

Chiasm is one of the most common literary devices essentially a variation on parallelism. The sequence A B B A is frequent in Hebrew literature as also here in the Psalms.

5.1.6. Choral organization

The organization of Psalm 136 makes it evident that apparently two parts are sung²⁵. "For his love endures forever" is repeated again and again with the part in between sung by a lead singer. It is very difficult to make sure that the Psalms were really intended to be sung this way since there is no arrangement given. But it seems to be natural to suppose that this was done as it is today in our churches.

5.2. Hymns

The Old Testament (like the New) is full of passages that have a hymnal structure. The Book of Amos is special in this regard because it is almost completely written in this style. Amos might have preached his message by singing it. The overall structure of the book is highly organized using substructures that are also structures of the Psalms. There is no way this could be regarded as primitive in any way. Amos displays an artful way of working with the text. For example in Chapter 5:1-17 is a structure that encapsulates the name of Yahweh mentioned in 5:8f²⁶.

Central Element	The name of God	The LORD (YAHWEH) is his Name
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²⁴See LHB 507 for an introductory treatment on various forms of parallelism employed in the Old Testament.

²⁵Rienecker, Fritz *Bibellexikon* p. 1103 Brockhaus Verlag, Wuppertal 1988

²⁶Christoph Lameter *AMOS 5:1-10 Exegetical Paper for OT521 (The Prophet Amos)* John McKenna Spring 1992.

First Layer	Praise	5:8 The one who made the Pleiades and Orion who 5:9 who makes destruction flash out against the strong ...
Second Layer	Accusation	5:7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood ... 5:10 Therefore because you trample on the poor ...
Third Layer	Admonition	5:4b Seek me and live! but do not seek Bethel ... 5:14 Seek good and not evil that you may live ..
Fourth Layer	Announcement of Lament	5:1 Fallen no more to rise is maiden Israel..... 5:16 ... In all squares there shall be wailing ...

Such structures, which are found frequently in the Old Testament, show a highly developed stage of literacy. Accepting and reworking some of these forms presented could add more variety to our worship. Especially creative in this passage from Amos 5 is the technique to hide the name of God behind all these layers to illustrate the Holiness of his name and his person. The hearer is separated from this name on both sides by the need to get rid of sin first. What a creativity!

The drawback is though that using these structures requires a lot of work with the text which is usually impossible for one in the pastorate with limited time.

5.3. Stories

Again these abound in the Old Testament and these stories like the narrative of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt become the source for songs. Psalm 135 and 136 reword the story into a song. Many stories are teaching something about God by just being told and the most popular ones (such as the sacrifice of Isaac, the Exodus, Abraham's leaving his home for the promised land) are well known in our congregations. Just picking up a motif from these in a song will lead to a whole series of association which can be used productively in worship. The aforementioned Psalms are just touching the issue but by doing that naturally assume a certain reaction in the participants.

Stories are the raw material on which we can build to illustrate important concepts in our worship. Due to the usual shortness of praise in comparison with a narrative it is very difficult to communicate a complex thought to the hearers. Using known themes from Old Testament stories allows worship to tap into a pool of already comprehended concepts that can be used and combined with other elements to communicate important comprehensive thoughts in a simple song.

Stories also have a corrective function toward our songs. Often we tend to redefine theological terms to fit our needs. For example redefinition of sin as an antisocial act. Stories can illustrate what these terms meant originally in terms of daily life.

5.4. Life

Looking over all the stories we have a chance of looking at complete life spans of Old Testament people. They can give us an example for our lives, warn us about issues that caused wrong developments.. For example Isaac's passivity in raising his sons Jacob and Esau causing them to be both screwed up in different ways. The same thing happens

again with Eli and Samuel. Their preoccupation with prophecy and service to the people leads to a disobedient youth that abuses the honor of the fathers office.

Looking at life from an eagles perspective allows us to reflect on issues that influence the totality of our lives like the choice of a marriage partner, raising of children, the satisfaction with life and so on. What made life worthwhile? How did their life witness to God? Some of the more extreme views on what life is all about that are propagated in our times can be corrected with seeing their lifestyle and their way of handling family.

Songs often remind us of the greatness of Abraham and of other heroes of faith. We often forget that they also were humans and could only live by the grace of God as we do. A little bit more realism from the life of these heroes would allow our congregations to more easily identify with them and perhaps gain some strength from them. The heroes of faith had the strength to stay in faithfulness with God despite all trouble that they caused themselves and all sins that they fell into.

6. Objections

Often people object to the usage of the Old Testament as normative for the Christian faith. The Old Testament is "primitive" and outdated. The notion is that it was replaced by the message of Jesus. But the message that Jesus brought was nothing else than the message already in the Old Testament and it is impossible to understand the New Testament without the basis in the Old. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:17-18: Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

6.1. Imprecatory Passages

Many people are offended by the Old Testament in particular because it is "primitive" in the fact that believers express their desire for revenge. This is very much evident in many of the Psalms where the one praying asks God to judge his enemy.

The most extreme example of a revenge wish comes to light in Psalm 137²⁷. The first half of Psalm 137 is a beautiful part that is often included in Hymnbooks because it expresses the longing of the Hebrews for the worship of Yahweh from exile. The second half is almost always strictly censored since it contains a call for revenge against the ones who caused the exile culminating in a blessing on those who smash the children of their oppressors against the rocks.

The hatred that is expressed here is a cause of concern for many. C.S. Lewis (Reflection on the Psalms) for example rejects the validity of these Psalms on the grounds that these utterances are natural human reaction to victimization. Other authors take this as "primitive". The psalmist was not saved in the New Testament sense and therefore these passages are evidence that the Hebrews needed Jesus Christ(John Bright The Authority of the Old Testament).

²⁷Christoph Lameter Psalm 137: The Problem of the Cursing Psalms OT504 Winter 1994 J.T. Butler

But before we pass an easy judgment on those passages we should first think about what we have in the New Testament. Is it really that different? Jesus announces the ultimate judgment of God coming on the last day for the sinners (Matt 25:46). There is "eternal punishment" waiting for those. Revelation is full of destruction that is coming in the last days with the evil ones being punished by suffering in a lake of fire (Rev 20:14-15). The saints under the throne of God are calling for the punishment for the death that they suffered by the hands of the evil doers (Rev 6:10).

What we often do not take into account is God's holiness and justice. Justice demands the punishment of the sinner, there is no difference in the New from the Old Testament. Therefore we have to take the call for revenge for sinful deeds as at the core of the biblical message.

We might be deluded by our contemporary idealization of a society without violence, but the daily news contradict our ideals constantly.

Jesus was not only nice and friendly as portrayed in popular opinion. He could say "Get behind me Satan" to Peter and announce the coming judgment for sin.

The call for the revenge is the call for God's justice to become evident. Imprecations can be inspired by the Holy Spirit and are not just a human product (J. Barton Payne Theology of the Old Testament). Therefore the second half of Psalm 137 could be sung (but is currently too offensive to be included completely). Calls for God's justice and the punishment of the sinners belong into our worship as they are also contained in the Psalms and the New Testament.

6.2. "The Old Testament is not valid for Christians today"

The invalidation of the Old Testament is a view that follows from the offense that one has taken from the "bloody" message of the Old Testament as discussed above. Yet the Old Testament is used throughout the New. It is unthinkable that the New could exist without the Old. During the initial period of the Church only the Old Testament was the scriptural basis of their life and discussion with others as evidenced by Paul's constant appeal to the Old Testament in his letters²⁸.

Christ himself recognized the validity and the binding nature of the Old Testament as quoted above. He rejected the misinterpretation of the Scripture by the legalistic exegesis of the Pharisees. He claimed to be the son of God based on the authority of Scripture (John 10:31-36).

Jesus looked on the Old Testament not as a set of rules as the Pharisees did but as a record of God's activity in the history of the Hebrews and himself as a logical continuation of this history.

There have been other instances where people have rejected the Old Testament on grounds of its primitivity. The first one was Marcion in the second century, who tried to cut out of the Scriptures all references to the primitive God of law of the Hebrews. Marcion was condemned and declared a heretic²⁹.

²⁸LHB p.1 Includes a longer discussion of the authority of the Old Testament for Christians

²⁹Bengt Haegglund History of Theology p. 41

In this century the line of theological liberalism that started with Adolf Harnack finally culminated in the German Christians who also rejected the Old Testament on the grounds of their Jewishness and supposedly primitiveness. The German Christians developed to be the instruments of Hitler to control the national German Church in the time of the Nazis³⁰.

We should be very careful to cut away from the authority of Scripture in this way. Without the Old Testament the basis of the New Testament is gone and what is left is to a big extent free to interpretation. Whatever one wants to read he may read in scripture.

7. Conclusion

Worship is firmly seated in the Old Testament. Christian worship has its origin in the "Old" Testament. The "Old" will give us guidelines for our worship and correct our practice of expressing worship in our services and in our lives showing us how deeply engrained worship was in the life of his people the people of Israel. Worship is our life. Sadly enough this paper cannot even adequately explore all the applications of the Old Testament for worship. I think I have just barely touched the surface of some important issues relevant for us today.

³⁰Franklin Hamilton Littel The German Phoenix: Men and Movements in the Church in Germany Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960 p. 180-188

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