

# MUSIC AND PROPHECY

1 Chronicles 25 alludes to the prophetic power of music, not so much in that it gives new revelation (for the [Canon of Scripture is now closed](#)), but more that it proclaims Biblical truths which is the other meaning of the verb to prophesy. For example, when the preacher delivers a message on Sunday using the Bible as his guide and the Spirit as his power, he is in effect prophesying, speaking forth the Word of Truth. Little wonder that one of Spurgeon's habits as he ascended each of the multiple steps to his preaching podium, was to say to himself and to God, "I need the Holy Spirit, I need the Holy Spirit, I need the Holy Spirit..." Indeed, we need the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Holy Word of God and to sing holy words to God. The following short discussion will unpack and then illustrate this principle.

1 Chronicles 25:1-3+ - Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, **who were to PROPHESEY** with lyres, harps and cymbals; and the number of those who performed their service was: 2 Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of **Asaph, who PROPHESED under the direction of the king**. 3 Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun with the harp, **who PROPHESED in giving thanks and praising the LORD**.

Paul would add this thought, referring to speaking, but applicable to singing Biblically rich hymns...

1 Corinthians 14:3+ one who prophesies speaks to men **foredification** and **exhortation** and **consolation**.

I would add one more effect of Biblically rich hymns is **evangelization** as illustrated below by Wesley's hymn [Arise My Soul, Arise](#).

First some comments on the meaning of to prophesy in the 1 Chronicles 25 passages...

**The MacArthur Study Bible**. This is not necessarily to be taken in a revelatory sense, but rather in the sense of proclamation and exhortation through the lyrics of their music (cf. 25:2, 3). Prophesying is not necessarily predicting the future or even speaking direct revelation. It is proclaiming truth (v. 5) to people (cf. 1Co 14:3), and music is a vehicle for such proclamation in praise (v. 3). David and the leaders selected those most capable (v. 7) of leading the people to worship God through their music. (Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – 1 Chronicles**. - note the term "prophecy" used for the ministry of the musicians. Most likely this meant that they were to proclaim God's Word through the music they sang and played in the worship services. The music was to be based upon the messages of the prophets, which were often expressed in the Psalms as well as in the prophecies they proclaimed.

**ESV Study Bible**, who prophesied with musical instruments, i.e., wrote songs. In some cases, their songs seem to have become part of OT Scripture, for Asaph is named in the titles of Psalms 50 and 73-83, and Jeduthun in the titles of Psalms 39, 62, and 77. In addition, Heman here may be the same person as Heman the Ezrahite named in the title of Psalm 88 (cf. also 1 Chron. 6:33). The verb "to prophesy" (Hb. naba') indicates that their songs were prompted or guided by the Spirit of God. This shows that "prophecy" is not always a direct announcement of God's plans; it indicates that the person is operating as God's authorized spokesman, here providing the right way for God's people to sing to him (they prophesied... in thanksgiving and praise to the Lord, 1Ch 25:3). (Borrow [ESV Study Bible](#))

**Eugene Merrill** - It is called a ministry of prophesying (1Ch 25:1) which no doubt meant a sort of musical proclamation of divine revelation and expressions of hymnic praise and worship. (Borrow [Bible Knowledge Commentary - Old Testament](#)).

**G Campbell Morgan** - "This work of praise is thrice described by a somewhat singular, and, in this connection, arresting word, 'prophecy.' The use of this word here is a revelation of the true value of the service of music in the sanctuary of God."

**Martin Selman** - Either they supplied messages direct from God in the manner of the classical prophets, for which the Levite Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20:14-17) provides an obvious analogy, or their praise was itself seen as 'prophecy' in that it proclaimed God's word with God's authority." (Borrow [1 Chronicles : an introduction and commentary](#))

**Utley on prophesy** - It is surprising that musical personnel are designated as "prophesying" (cf. 1Ch 25:1,2,3). Even the son of Heman is said to be the king's "seer." Music in worship was considered a divine act, as was revealing a message (1Ch 25:5, "according to the words of God"). **Music revealed truths about God and His will!** There was no theoretical distinction for Israel between the secular and the sacred. Life, all of life, was revealed and sacred! The Chronicler asserts a prophetic role to Levites several times. (1) 2Ch 20:14-17 – **Jahaziel**, a Levite prophesies (2) 2Ch 29:30 – **Asaph**, the seer (3) 2Ch 34:30 is repeated in 2 Kgs. 23:2 where "prophet" replaces "Levites" (4) 2Ch 35:15 – **Jeduthun** the king's seer (5) 2 Chr. 24:19-22 – a priest acts as a

prophet. See his lengthy discussion of [PROPHECY in the Old Testament](#)

**Roddy Braun** - we are to understand that for the writer the instructive and hortatory words of religious personnel such as Levites and priests (2 Chr 24:20) have become at least one way in which God reveals his will to his people, much as, for example, some measure of divine authority is sometimes attributed to Christian preachers today. That temple personnel, and especially the singers, should have aspired to such a claim is certainly not unexpected in view of their efforts not only to be considered Levites, but apparently as pre-eminent among the Levites (Borrow [1 Chronicles](#) - Word Biblical Commentary)

**Temper Longman** - The ministry of the singers/instrumentalists is clearly a musical one (1Ch 25:1), yet their work is called prophesying. They are probably not foretelling the future as some of the prophets do, but rather forth-telling the mighty works of God through their music. (Layman's Commentary - 1 Chronicles - Job)

**August Konkell** - an important function of prophecy was to make confession and give praise, which involved music. This conforms to fundamental concepts of prophecy, to lead people in knowing the work of God in his world. Certain psalms are exhortation, drawing lessons from the past (e.g., Ps 77); others are confessions about the character of God as the Creator (e.g., Pss 103; 104). Psalms were one of the most important aspects of prophets doing the work of admonishment, correction, and confession. (1 & 2 Chronicles elievers Church Bible Commentary)

**Andrew Hill** - Selman summarizes by saying either this Levitical prophecy "supplied messages direct from God in the manner of the classical prophets" (cf. Jahaziel in 2 Chron. 20:14-17) or their musical praise is seen as "prophecy" in that "it proclaimed God's word with God's authority."<sup>37</sup> The latter view seems more in keeping with the context of the Levitical ministry of "prophecy" in the form of teaching or the exposition of Mosaic law (cf. Deut. 33:10). It also fits the Chronicler's modus operandi of reconnecting the postexilic community to the key offices of king and prophet through temple worship. In fact, he may be calling the Levitical musicians of his day to revitalize their temple ministry by reminding them of their heritage. (1 & 2 Chronicles NIV Application Commentary)

Below is an example of an extra-Biblical hymn by Charles Wesley which illustrates the power of bibliocentric music to "prophesy" (proclaim truth of God). Oh, for the church to return to the rich "prophecy" (proclamation of Biblical truths) in the hymns of old. Little wonder that when one is filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) the first effect described is "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." (Eph 5:19, cf Col 3:16). Are we missing something "prophetic" in the modern church by failing to frequently sing the doctrinally rich hymns of yesteryear? Just a thought to ponder. The following hymn is an illustration of the "prophetic power" of Charles Wesley's hymn Arise My Soul Arise. You will note that I have added Scriptures that relate to some of the lines to demonstrate the bibliocentric nature of this great hymn and why it had such a life-changing impact on one group who heard/sang it in the West Indies.

### [Arise My Soul, Arise](#)

by Charles Wesley

Arise, my soul, arise;

Shake off the guilty fears;

The bleeding Sacrifice (Jn 1:29)

In my behalf appears: (See 1Co 15:3, 1Co 11:24-26 - huper = in my place)

Before the throne my Surety stands,

Before the throne my Surety stands: (In finance a surety involves promise by one party to assume responsibility for debt of a borrower if borrower defaults)

My name is written on His hands. (Isa 49:15, John 20:25 Rev 5:6) (Jer 34:18-20)

Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise

Arise, my soul, arise.

Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise

Arise, my soul, arise.

Shake off your guilty fears and rise

He ever lives above,

For me to intercede, (Heb 7:25, Ro 8:34)

His all-redeeming love,

His precious blood to plead; (1 Pe 1:13-19)

His blood atoned for all our race,

His blood atoned for all our race,

And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Shake off your guilty fears and rise

Five bleeding wounds He bears, (Isaiah 53:5, Zech 13:7, 1Pe 2:24-25)

Received on Calvary;

They pour effectual pray'rs,

They strongly plead for me:

"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry, (Lk 23:34)

"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry,

"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!" (Mk 10:45)

Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Shake off your guilty fears and rise

My God is reconciled; (2 Cor 5:18-21)

His pard'ning voice I hear;

He owns me for His child;

I can no longer fear; (1 John 4:16-18, 2 Ti 1:7, Lk 1:74, Heb 2:15)

With confidence I now draw nigh, (Heb 4:16, Heb 10:19-24, 1Jn 2:28)

With confidence I now draw nigh,

And, "Father, Abba, Father, " cry. (Mk 14:36, Ro 8:15, Gal 4:6)

Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Arise (arise), arise (arise), arise  
Arise, my soul, arise.  
Shake off your guilty fears and rise

And now for the effect this hymn had one one group of hearers/singers! Ira Sankey records in his book, [My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns](#), the following account of the amazing power of the gospel as articulated in this song:

"I have a record," said a Wesleyan missionary laboring in the West Indies, "of two hundred persons, young and old, who received the most direct evidence of the forgiveness of their sins while singing '[Arise My Soul](#).' The conversion of the greater number of these persons took place while I was a missionary abroad."

And here is a Biblical example of an actual revelatory prophecy and the power of music in one of the great stories in the Old Testament...

Then in the midst of the assembly the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite of the sons of Asaph; 15 and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, '**Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's.**' 16 'Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley in front of the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 '**You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.**' **Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the LORD is with you.**" 18 Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD.

19 **The Levites, from the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel, with a very loud voice.** 20 They rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "**Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed.**" 21 When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "**Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.**"

**22 When they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed.** 23 For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. 24 When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude, and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped. (2 Chronicles 20:14-24)