

# **The Divine Institution of the Lord's Song in Chronicles**

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The theology of worship in Chronicles is characterized by two seemingly contradictory points of emphasis. On the one hand, we have the insistence by the Chronicler that the sacrificial ritual at the temple be conducted according to the law of Moses (1 Chron. 6.49 [Heb. 6.34]; 16.40; 2 Chron. 8.13; 23.18; 31.3). On the other hand, we have his repeated reference to the institution of the choral rite by David as an integral part of the regular sacrificial ritual at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 6.31-32 [Heb. 6.16-17]; 16.41; 23.4-5, 30-31; 25.1; 2 Chron. 8.14; 23.18; 29.25; 35.15).

Now the organization of the choral rite as part of the sacrificial ritual seems to be inconsistent with the four basic principles of worship to be found in Chronicles. The first is that the people of Israel could only worship the Lord through the rituals ordained by him in the law of Moses. The law of Moses prescribed how, when, where, and by whom the burnt offering was to be performed (1 Chron. 6.49 [Heb. 6.34]; 16.40; 2 Chron. 8.13; 23.18; 31.3). The public worship of Israel was therefore only legitimate as long as it was conducted as God had ordained. Was not then the choral service illegitimate, since it had not been instituted by Moses?

The second principle is that David and his successors were responsible for the implementation of the sacrificial ritual ordained in the law of Moses. Their statutes regulated the actual performance of worship.

In an article on 'Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles',<sup>1</sup> S. de Vries has shown that the Chronicler uses two sets of formulations for the organization of worship at the temple—the *authorization formulae* which refer to what was divinely prescribed for worship by noting that a particular point of ritual was performed 'according to what was written in the law' or 'according to what the Lord had commanded',<sup>2</sup> and the *regulation formulae* which usually refer to the ritual statutes enacted by David and his successors by noting that a point of ritual was performed 'according to the statute' or 'commandment' for them.<sup>3</sup> Now, while the authorization formulae are never used for the choral rite, the regulation formulae are used for it in 1 Chron. 6.32 (Heb. 6.17), 2 Chron. 8.14, 29.25 and 35.15, as if the choral service had been prescribed in the law. How could these regulations of David for the choral service be binding on his successors if they derived only from him and his royal authority?

The third principle is that any unauthorized innovation in the essential features of sacrificial ritual at the temple was sacrilegious apostasy. In 2 Chron. 13.4-12 Abijah accused the northerners of apostasy, because Jereboam's ritual innovations were contrary to the law of Moses. Consequently, the Lord had forsaken them and was no longer with them as he had once been. Yet, how did these measures differ substantially from the measures taken by David and Solomon for the performance of the choral service as part of the regular sacrificial ritual?

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<sup>1</sup> *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 619-39.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Chron. 6.49 (Heb. 6.34); 15.15; 16.40; 28.19; 2 Chron. 8.13; 23.18; 30.5, 18; 31.3; 35.6, 12..

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Chron. 6.32 (Heb. 6.17); 15.13; 23.31; 24.19; 2 Chron. 4.7, 20; 8.14; 23.18; 29.15, 25; 30.6, 12, 16; 35.4, 10, 13, 15, 16.

The fourth principle is that worship is a beneficial enterprise only as long as it is performed in accordance with divine law. In fact, its divine institution empowers it, so that through it the Lord meets with his people and acts in their favour. Hence, the Lord was with those who worshipped him as he had directed (2 Chron. 13.10-12). One could therefore seek the Lord and worship him only as he had determined (2 Chron. 7.12-15). Such orthodoxy led to success (1 Chron. 22.13; 2 Chron. 31:21); it resulted in the possession of the land (1 Chron. 28.8; 2 Chron. 33.8), just as failure to worship him correctly resulted in dispossession from the land and the destruction of the temple (2 Chron. 7.19-22). If the performance of ritual was beneficial only because it had been instituted by God, then surely the singing of sacred song during the presentation of the burnt offering was, at best, unproductive and, at worst, a counterproductive activity.<sup>4</sup>

The insistence of the Chronicler on the correct performance of divinely ordained ritual seems to be contradicted by David's foundation of the choral service in Jerusalem. How then could this major innovation be justified, and why was it considered legitimate<sup>5</sup>

The Chronicler deals with this problem in two ways. First, he affirms the prophetic institution of the choral rite. Secondly, he supports this innovation by allusion to three pieces of legislation in the Pentateuch.

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<sup>4</sup> Since G. von Rad (*Theologie des Alten Testaments* [2 vols.; Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957], p. 349) fails to appreciate the importance of the divine institution of Israel's worship in Chronicles, he speaks rather dismissively of a formal and external reference to the correspondence of a certain cultic usage with a canonical ritual regulation.

<sup>5</sup> No modern scholar has investigated this question, even though it was a matter of some debate in rabbinical circles. In *b. 'Arak*. 11 the rabbis argued that, even though sacred song was not an essential part of the sacrificial ritual, it was an obligatory rite which had been implicitly instituted in the law of Moses.

The story of Hezekiah's restoration of temple worship asserts in 2 Chron. 29.25 that the choral performance was in fact authorized by the Lord:

And he (Hezekiah) stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the King's seer and of Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was by the Lord through his prophets.

David received the commandment to institute the performance of sacred song from the Lord through Nathan and Gad. They not only authorized the choral rite, but also prescribed the location of the musicians, the range of instruments, and the personnel (the Levites) who were to perform it during the presentation of the burnt offering.

Even though the choral rite was ordained by the Lord through his prophets and organized by his royal deputy David, the Chronicler, apparently, did not regard that in itself as a sufficient basis for this innovation. He therefore presented a theological rationale for it based on the exegesis of selected passages from the Pentateuch. While these passages do not explicitly mention choral music, they do give certain divine directives which, according to the Chronicler, were properly implemented only by the performance of the choral rite during the public burnt offering.

The first is Deut. 10.8 with its associated legislation in Deut. 18.5. In his decree about the transportation of the ark in 1 Chron. 15.2, David repeated the substance of these two passages.<sup>6</sup> He

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<sup>6</sup> While J.W. Rothstein and J. Hänel (*Das erste Buch der Chronik* [Leipzig: D. Werner Scholl. 1927], pp. 273, 309) propose that David alludes to Num. 1.48-50 and 3.5-37, G. von Rad (*Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930], p.99) demonstrates that it paraphrases Deut. 10.8 and 18.5.

realized that he had not sought the Lord in the right way in his first attempt to transfer the ark (1 Chron. 15.13).<sup>7</sup> On the basis of Deut. 10.8, he therefore decreed that the Levites should carry the ark on their shoulders rather than in a cart, and so minister to the Lord as they had been chosen to do.<sup>8</sup>

The Chronicler's allusion to Deut. 10.8 and 18.5 in 1 Chron. 15.2 determines the unity of 1 Chron. 15.1-25.<sup>9</sup> The Levites were to carry the ark and minister to the Lord in the transferral of the ark to Jerusalem. The organization of these two tasks is then dealt with separately. First, the arrangements for the transportation of the ark are described in three parts: the assembly of the Levites in their six groupings (15.4-10), David's instruction to them and the priests about the ark (vv. 11-13), and the fulfilment of that instruction (vv. 14-15). Secondly, the parallel arrangement of the musical ministry is also covered in three parts: the command

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<sup>7</sup> The suffix *on d<sup>e</sup>rašnuhū* in 1 Chron. 13.3 and 15.13 is, it seems, deliberately ambiguous. It could refer either to the ark, if the context is decisive, or to the Lord, if common usage prevails.

<sup>8</sup> Only if the connection of this passage with Deut. 10.8 and 18.5 is disregarded could it be argued, as A.C. Welch does (*The Work of the Chronicler: Its Purpose and Date* [London: Oxford University Press, 1939], p. 67), that the Levites ministered to the ark rather than to the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> The unity of 1 Chron. 15.1-25 has been called into question by most critical scholars, beginning with Rothstein and Hänel, *Des erste Buch der Chronik*, pp. 304-12, and M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1943), p. 116. They argue that the appointment of the singers in 1 Chron. 15.16-24, after the procession had already begun, disrupted the narrative flow from 1 Chron. 15.15 to 15.25-28. H.G.M. Williamson (*1 and 2 Chronicles* [London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1982], pp. 121-22, 124-26) counters this argument by noting that 15.26 carries on the narrative from 15.15. In any case the Chronicler is more interested in ritual precedent and procedure than in chronological continuity in his narrative.

to appoint the choir for the purpose of rejoicing (v. 16), the appointment of the choir (vv. 17- 24), and the transferral of the ark with rejoicing as commanded (v. 25). 1 Chron. 15.1-25 is therefore a literary unit which describes the involvement of the Levites in the twofold task of transporting the ark and performing the ministry of song to the Lord.

The Levites were given two discreet and yet complementary tasks by David in 1 Chron. 15.2; the transportation of the ark, and ministry to the Lord. On the face of it, the mention of ministry to the Lord seems out of place in a discussion on the correct way to move the ark to Jerusalem. The phrase could hardly have come in here by accident from Deut. 10.8, since the Chronicler deliberately excludes what he considers irrelevant—for example, the duty 'to bless in his name', which, for him, was the responsibility of the priests rather than the Levites (1 Chron. 23.13; 2 Chron. 30.27). He also recalls Deut. 18.5 by his mention of the divine election of the Levites and the perpetuity of their ministry. The task involved in this ministry is explained in 1 Chronicles 16. The Levites were to 'minister' to the Lord in the morning and evening ritual of sacrifice before the ark (1 Chron. 16.4, 37) as at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chron. 6.32 [Heb. 6.17]). This ministry was performed by 'proclaiming', 'thanking' and 'praising' him (1 Chron. 16:4; cf. 2 Chron. 8.14; 31.2). Their ministry to the Lord was therefore the ministry of song (1 Chron. 6.32 [Heb. 6.17]).

The argument implied is as follows. The temporary responsibility of the Levites for the transportation of the ark was part of a more permanent duty to minister to the Lord who sat enthroned above it and met with his people there. This ministry which, according to Deut. 18.5, 7, was 'in' or 'with the Lord's name', was carried out by the Levites as they proclaimed that name in songs of praise. So then, while liturgical song was not explicitly instituted in the Pentateuch, it was held to be included in the

commission of the Levites by the Lord to minister in his name.

Num. 10.10 is the second passage from the Pentateuch used by the author of Chronicles to provide a theological basis for the choral rite. It comes at the end of a section which contains the regulations for the use of the trumpets by the priests. The whole section on the trumpets in 10.1-10 is enclosed by the description of the cloud, by which the Lord tabernacled with his people (Num. 9.15-23) and led them as his army with his ark to their destination (Num. 10.11-36). The trumpets are therefore associated thematically with the Lord's presence and the ark.

Apart from communicating information (Num. 10.1-8), the trumpets served a common ritual function in two different and yet related contexts. In war they were blown before the army as it went into battle, so that Israel would be 'remembered' and given victory by the Lord; in the cult they were sounded over the burnt offerings and peace offerings, to bring the people to the Lord's 'remembrance' and him to their 'remembrance' (Num. 10.9-10).

1 Chron. 16.4 says that David appointed the Levitical choir to 'proclaim'<sup>10</sup> the Lord, the God of Israel. The term is noteworthy for its singularity. Nowhere else is the *hiphil* of *zkr* used in Chronicles as a synonym for thanking and praising the Lord in the context of liturgical song. By itself the function of this reference is unclear, since it seems to add nothing to the other two verbs which stand in apposition with it.

J.W. Rothstein and J. Hänel<sup>11</sup> propose two possible explanations of this term. The first takes its cue from the

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<sup>10</sup> R. Eising ('zākar'), *ThWAT*, II, cols. 582-85) concludes that the *hiphil* of *zkr* can be best translated by 'extol', 'proclaim', 'confess', 'invoke'; cf. Ps. 20.7 (Heb. 20.8); Isa. 26.13; 62.6; Amos 6.10.

<sup>11</sup> *Das erste Buch der Chronik*, p. 287.

title *ʿhazkîr* in Psalms 38 and 70. There, as in Isa. 66.3, the *hiphil* of *zkr* is used as a denominative for the presentation of a memorial offering (*ʿazkārâ*). The word *hazkîr* would then refer to the songs sung during the memorial offering in the sacrificial ritual.<sup>12</sup> This proposal, however, is rather unlikely, given that the sacrifices were at that time presented only at the altar in Gibeon.<sup>13</sup>

Their second, preferred explanation is that the use of *hazkîr* was meant to recall the function of the trumpets in Num. 10.10. The Chronicler, then, associated the work of the singers in thanking and praising the Lord with the work of the priests in sounding their trumpets in 1 Chron. 16.6. By this allusion he did not imply that only the priests 'proclaimed' the Lord, while the Levites thanked and praised him,<sup>14</sup> but that the Levites joined with the priestly trumpeters in proclaiming his presence. In fact, 'the singers fulfilled the same function as the trumpet'.<sup>15</sup> This combination of trumpets with sacred song is so important for the Chronicler that he never mentions the use of trumpets in worship apart from the other musical instruments.<sup>16</sup> The playing of the musical instruments and the singing of the Lord's song are therefore regarded as an

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<sup>12</sup> See also Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler*, pp. 67-68 n. 1.

<sup>13</sup> So also Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (HAT, 21; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1955), p. 120. Yet this is not a compelling argument, since, as E.L. Curtis and A.A. Madsen have shown (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Chronicles* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910], pp. 220-21), 'these Levites were to conduct the musical liturgy before the ark at the same time that the offerings were being made on the altar at Gibeon with the corresponding musical service'.

<sup>14</sup> Contra Rothstein and Hänel, *Das erste Buch der Chronik*, p. 287. Rudolph (*Chronikbücher*, p. 120) rightly notes that 1 Chron. 16.4 excludes this interpretation.

<sup>15</sup> S. Zalewski, 'Cultic Officials in the Book of Chronicles' (doctoral dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1968), p. 308.

<sup>16</sup> See 1 Chron. 13.8; 15.17-24, 28; 16.4-6, 42; 2 Chron. 5.12-13; 7.6; 20:28; 23.13; 29.26-28.



extension of the priestly mandate to blow the trumpets over the burnt offerings at the altar. The Chronicler therefore justifies the place of liturgical song in the sacrificial ritual by connecting it with the blowing of trumpets over the sacrifices, for the trumpets were, after all, the only musical instruments explicitly ordained by the Lord for worship.

The argument of Chronicles would then run as follows. By the blowing of trumpets the priests were to proclaim the Lord's presence to his people. But the trumpets could not by themselves announce the Lord's presence. Indeed, how else could his presence be announced than by mention of his name, which was his 'mode of remembrance' (Exod. 3.15)? The trumpet was therefore supplemented by the instruments used to accompany those sacred songs which were sung to introduce the Lord by name. The whole temple choir, with its priestly trumpeters and Levitical musicians, announced the Lord and proclaimed his presence. The divine command of Num. 10.10 was thus fulfilled by David through the institution of the choral rite.

The third theological justification from the Pentateuch for sacred song is given in 2 Chron. 23.18. The priests and the Levites were divided into groups 'to offer up the burnt offerings of the Lord according to the written record in the law of Moses with rejoicing and song, as David had directed'. As the MT indicates in its punctuation, the last phrase is resumptive; it refers to the whole subordinate clause rather than just to the preceding phrase. The passage then seems to imply that the law had ordered the burnt offerings to be presented with singing.

Yet the matter is not quite as straightforward as that. We have here a combination of the formula for divine authorization with the formula for ritual

regulation.<sup>17</sup> Since, as H.G.M. Williamson has shown,<sup>18</sup> *kakkāttâb* is used to qualify only what immediately precedes it, 2 Chron. 23.18 contrasts the command in the Pentateuch to present burnt offerings to the Lord with the directive of David to do so with songs of rejoicing. Now this directive is itself based on the exegesis of certain passages in Deuteronomy, such as 12.6-7, 11-12, 18, 16.10-11, 26.11 and 27.6-7, where the Israelites are told to present their sacrifices at one chosen sanctuary and to rejoice there in the Lord's presence.

2 Chron. 23.18 should most likely be taken with 1 Chron. 15.16 and 2 Chron. 29.30. In 1 Chron. 15.16 David commands the chiefs of the Levites to appoint the Levitical choir to raise music 'for rejoicing' during the transportation of the ark to Jerusalem. The same point is made in 2 Chron. 29.30, where the psalms of David and Asaph are said to have been performed during the presentation of the burnt offering 'to produce rejoicing' (*'ad-<sup>l</sup>śimḥâ*). The choral rite was therefore instituted to create rejoicing, first during the transferral of the ark, and then during the presentation of the public burnt offerings, as commanded in Deuteronomy.

The Chronicler understood the command to rejoice in Deuteronomy as an instruction to perform liturgical song. This was made possible exegetically by the identification of rejoicing in Deuteronomy with

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<sup>17</sup> See de Vries. 'Moses and David', p. 629.

<sup>18</sup> H.G. M. Williamson, 'History', in D.A. Carson and H.G. M. Williamson (eds.), *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 25-38.

music and song, as in Ps. 100.2. So, then, by the equation of rejoicing with liturgical song, the Chronicler laid the third theological foundation for the place of choral music in the sacrificial cult. God's command to rejoice in his presence was to be fulfilled through the performance of sacred song, which created joy in the hearts of the people and articulated it for them.

The Chronicler implies that the sacrificial ritual at the temple in Jerusalem had to be conducted in conformity with the divine legislation which instituted it, if it was to serve its divinely given function of mediating the Lord's presence and blessing to his people. Choral music was an important part of the sacrificial ritual. Even though it was not commanded by Moses, it was instituted by David in fulfilment of the Lord's commands to him through the prophets Gad and Nathan. This, however, was consistent with the Mosaic tradition. Indeed, the institution of the choral rite fulfilled three divine commands in the law: the instruction in Num. 10.10 for the priests to 'proclaim' the Lord at the altar; the commission in Deut. 10.8 and 18.5 of the Levites to 'minister in his name'; and the injunctions in Deuteronomy for all Israelites to 'rejoice' in his presence. So, since liturgical music was divinely authorized and consistent with the pattern and purpose of the sacrificial ritual, it was effectual in proclaiming the presence of the Lord and announcing his acceptance of the Israelites with their public sacrifices.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I have explored this further in my published doctoral dissertation, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (JSOTS 146; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

## **ABSTRACT**

The Chronicler justifies David's organization of sacred song as an integral part of sacrificial ritual in two ways. First, he asserts that the Lord commanded this through the prophets Nathan and Gad. Secondly, he argues that its performance was implied (1) by the instruction to the priests in Num. 10.10 to proclaim the Lord's saving presence at the altar, (2) by the commission to the Levites in Dent, 10.8 and 18.5 to minister in his name, and (3) by the injunctions in Deuteronomy to the Israelites that they should rejoice in his presence.

