

Acapella Worship

“A capella” is Latin for “In the manner of the chapel” or “In the manner of the church”. During the Renaissance, choral music in church was more popular than instrumental, and it was unaccompanied.

Church's history:

- NT: no account of singing with instruments (Yes, in the OT, but there has been a transition from types to reality.)
- Girardeau: instruments first formally come in by the Roman Catholic Church in 1290 AD. In the Orthodox Greek Church, they never have used instruments.
- The Reformers got rid of instruments. The Dutch got rid of organs (not just the Scots). The famous London Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, agreed instruments were Old Testament Temple (like incense and priestly vestments) and not to be used now. Google his quotes.
- “In fact, up until about 200 years ago, the use of instruments in worship was quite limited to those of the Lutheran and Catholic persuasions. Protestants didn't use instruments for the most part and sang only from the psalter which is the actual worship book of the church, i.e., the Psalms ...” (Timothy Hammons, *Aquila Report* article on worship, August 21, 2012).

Understanding the Old Testament Worship Types and Signs as Fulfilled in Christ:

- When Moses was first given Tabernacle commands (Ex. 25-29), no musical instruments are mentioned.
- Only trumpets are later mentioned and were not for accompanying singing. Numbers 10:2ff: they were for calling assemblies and calling to arms. Also, in terms of the Tabernacle, they were to be blown over the burnt offerings – (Numbers 10:10). It was OT ceremony.
- In 2 Chron. 5:12-13, the priests play instruments while bringing the Ark into the Temple for dedication. This was not the same as corporate worship we are speaking of (similarly, signing on the other side of the Red Sea in Ex. 15 was national rejoicing, not corporate tabernacle worship).
- No instruments are mentioned in worship until David: 1 Chron 23:1-6; 1 Chron 28:11-13, 19; 2 Chron 29:25-27. Instrumental music was never involved with singing until David received divine commandment to introduce setting up the Temple (by Solomon).
- See how the use of priestly instruments stop after the animal sacrifice is completed, while singing yet continues unaccompanied in 2 Chronicles 29:28-30.
- No instruments were used in the Synagogue worship (where Jews worshipped when not at Temple, and much the model of NT worship). Until the 19th century, Orthodox Jews did not use instruments (some still). They are led by a cantor (male singer, something like our precenter). Instruments were only in the Temple where the animal sacrifices were made (the Temple is now gone). The Synagogue grew out of the need to gather and study in dispersion; but it would never execute temple functions, such as musical instruments.
- Dr. James Begg: “As good an argument can be made for the use of priests, sacrifices, indeed of the whole temple system, as for the use of instrumental music in Christian worship.” (“On the Use of Organs”, in Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of the Church*, 68).
- The work of Christ is typified in OT Temple System. Just as much so, the work of the Holy Spirit. The washing with water and the anointing in Tabernacle and Temple both typified work of the Holy Spirit in N.T. Lamp stands in Zech 4/Revelation 11:4 for instance. The work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the New Testament Temple also was prophesied in Ezekiel and Jeremiah; see also Joel 2:28-30 (Zech 12:10) used in Acts 2:1(15)-21. The instruments in the Old Testament Temple typified the instruments of our hearts in the NT today: Spirit-filled worship.

Ephesians 5:19: “making melody” in our hearts is literally in the Greek “to pluck or twang”. The instruments of the joy of the Holy Ghost are now our hearts in worship, which the priestly instruments represented in the Old Testament. Remember, we are now the Spiritual Temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). Girardeau notes, “ ... the instrumental music of the temple-worship was typical of the joy and triumph of God's believing people to result from the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament times ... it pleased God to typify the spiritual joy to spring from a richer possession of the Holy Spirit through the sensuous rapture engendered by the passionate melody of stringed instruments and the clash of cymbals, by

the blare of trumpets and the ringing of harps.”⁶.

If we do not sing Psalms acapella to God as He wishes us to do with joy like the playing of instruments, then let us pray for the Holy Spirit to move in us to worship Him with our whole hearts with more full appreciation of our redemption fully accomplished by Christ and fully applied to us by the Holy Spirit (as typified in the OT ceremonial system, now fulfilled and so done away with).

Suggestions for Further Study:

- *Instrumental Worship in the Church*, John Lafayette Girardeau (a deceased Presbyterian pastor)
- *Old Light on New Worship*, John Price (a contemporary Baptist pastor)
- *Public Worship 101: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Worship, the Elements of Worship, Exclusive Psalmody, and A Capella Psalmody*, Dennis Prutow
- *Worship: From Genesis to Revelation*, Douglas Comin
- PRPC website “Resources/Articles and Media” section, under “Purity of Worship” here: <https://puritanchurch.com/about/doctrine-and-practice/practice-what-duty-god-requires-of-us/>
- At the above link, please see the 10-minute video produced by Pastor Van Leuven on “Purity of Worship” while interning at Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Gibsonia, PA

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⁶ Girardeau, 60-61.