

Biblical Overview, IV: Judah, Psalms & Prophets

Let us open with prayer.

Father God, Lord Jesus, again, we do come before You with thanksgiving in our hearts, just for a beautiful day here and this awesome opportunity to come together to learn about You and Your character and Your Word. I pray that You would open our hearts and our minds to receive what You have for us. I pray that You would speak through Dr. Dalbey here. And I pray for everyone back at home who is receiving this in audio or video format, wherever they are, that they also would have hearts and minds open and that they would be focused through the distractions of life. I pray that they would really receive and grow through what we are about to experience here. Father, we thank You for everything You are to us and the abilities that You have given us and the opportunities that You give to us. We appreciate Your operation in our life. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Amen. Thank you. I will start this session, building on last time, by trying to understand how some of these Old Testament dimensions of the people of God in His presence who are worshiping Him might apply in a New Testament context. Again, I go to Ghana, West Africa, where I had the opportunity several times to be with Presbyterians who are unlike any Presbyterians I know in the United States. This is in terms of their expressiveness in worship. The first time I worshiped in a Presbyterian church in Ghana, a very interesting dynamic happened during the receiving of the offering. We were in a building that probably seated 1500, and it was full. There were two places in the front of the worship area where they had set up these big containers for people to put their money into. The next thing we knew, they were on their feet, singing a song of joy, and dancing down to the front of the worship area to put their offering in the container. They sang “I have joy in my heart, deep down in my heart” while they put the offering in the basket. They sang this song about being joyful in God’s presence while they danced and brought their offerings to the Lord.

That caused me to ponder a bit. What is most honoring to God when we enter into the element of worship we call the offering? Biblically, if I were to ask you to fill in the blank, what one word describes what should be going on in the worshiper when presenting his or her offering? Joy or cheer could be the one word. When the Ghanaians bring their offerings, it is pretty obvious—at least by their outward expression and what they sing about as they bring their offering—that it is full of joy. You would not find the same thing in American PCA churches. I happen to be in a consulting role with some different churches near Covenant Seminary, so I go to a monthly meeting with the worship team from one of the churches. We were talking about what the element of the offering looks like at this particular American PCA church. It looks like this: people sit in the pew quietly; the organist plays music. Sometimes it is sad, somber music. The only sound you hear from the worshiper might be if he has an old Velcro wallet, like I used to, and you hear it tear open. That is the sound you would hear, or maybe it is a pocket book opening or closing. If outside observers were able to be present in the church in Accra, Ghana, they would see people singing songs of joy and bringing their tithes and offerings forward. They would describe those people as happy, joyful people. If the same people would be transported over to this American church on a Sunday morning, or any other American PCA church, they would describe those people during the receiving of the offering, more often than not, as sad. It looks like they are not very excited about parting with their hard-earned money.

This is where it gets difficult for those of us in our context as Presbyterians in the West. I ask you, which is more biblical? What is the primary emphasis biblically as to how the worshiper should come before God with his or her offering? God is the emphasis. What is the conclusion from that? Should this

particular church do their offering exactly like the Ghanaians? Westerners went to Africa and told them how to worship. They said to use organs, dressed with ruffled shirts and ties and jackets. If you are going to worship God rightly, you have to worship like northern Europeans. So can we not say that if this American church is going to worship correctly, then they have to worship like West Africans? Of course we would not say that, even though we have been guilty of doing that in reverse. I would ask what it would take for an outside observer to come in and say, short of dancing and coming forward and putting money in barrels, that these people are worshiping God with joy when they bring their offering to Him. What would it look like at this American church? One suggestion I have is to have the congregation sing a song of joy while seated in the pews giving their offering. That would be a big step. Sing “Joy to the world, the Lord is come” or “Rejoice, the Lord is King.” Pick a hymn; there are plenty that have to do with joy. Sing “Joyful, joyful we adore Thee.” We are excited about bringing our tithes and offerings. We are cheerful givers. To me it does not have to include dance. What the dance says in that context, along with the joyful song, is that we are giving our tithes cheerfully. Could they just go through the motions and not give from a heart full of cheerful giving? Of course they could. The fact that they are dancing, coming forward, and singing does not guarantee the right heart. Does the fact that people are sitting with a frown on their face with somber music being played on the organ mean that it is not being offered from a cheerful heart? No, but it seems that there should be a match. Integrity means that if it is not in my heart, I should not pretend to have it. But if it is in my heart, does not integrity say it should also show because God gave me ways of showing it? That is my point.

One attempt to bring joy that is often used in American churches is for the congregation to stand and sing the doxology once the offering is collected and is being brought back to the front of the church. It helps move the congregation as if the ushers are representing the congregation presenting their offerings to God. That is the idea. We tend to do musical things during the offering. I preached at a local PCA church this past Sunday, and they had a guest pianist for the prelude, the offertory, and the postlude. He was outstanding. He was an older man who played so beautifully and humbly. When he was done he slipped over and sat in a place in which you could not see him, almost as fast as his hands were done playing the song. It seemed like he was saying, “I want to do this to the glory of God, and it is not about me.” The offertory was about seven minutes long, even though it only took two minutes to collect the offering.

There are ways to bring joy to the offering. Those are the kinds of questions you need to ask. What would joy look like at your church? That is the biblical principle. Find ways of expressing that in that context. Rather than categories of worship, there is a worshiping personality at every local church that is constantly changing to some degree. People are coming and going and growing. They are being exposed to other worship resources that can be used, ancient and present. I long for the day when we delight in the people of God worshiping in all their various places. We should not evaluate on the manner in which Gospel-centered worship is expressed, but on whether or not Gospel-centered worship is taking place in its multifaceted possible ways of being expressed. To me there is unity in that. There is delighting in the diversity within that unity. That transcends where we usually get stuck. We end up making worship about something other than being fully in the presence of God, worshiping with all our might. We get stuck on whether the preacher I most enjoy is going to preach today. If he is not you say, “I am not sure I am going to worship well today because so and so is not preaching.” Or you walk in and you may want to see what songs you are singing today. You look and see that none of your favorites are there. Compare this to entering into worship. As long as none of those songs are contrary to biblical content or out of synch with what the flow of the service is at a given time, say to the Lord, “Give me a heart to enter in fully. Help me to worship like David, like Miriam and the women. Help me remember what you have done that has brought me here and to enter in with the fullness of joy that is consistent with arriving in the heavenly Jerusalem even as I arrive at this local church.” That is when it does not matter

if you are singing in tune or out of tune. When hearts are fully devoted to God, His Holy Spirit takes that and Christ leads that and sings with that. Then God is glorified and people are edified. You want to go out and tell others about this Jesus you have been worshiping. It ties together that way.

There is a wonderful Old Testament narrative that is, at one level, about Israel defeating its enemies. At another level it is very instructive for our understanding of the centrality of the people of God worshiping their God in the advancement of His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The passage is 2 Chronicles 20. I preached a sermon from this passage in a little church in the yam market in Accra, Ghana with a group of people who met in a little place in which there were too many people living in a very small area. They were worshiping in this open-air place with drums as their only instruments. That was the instrument of the morning. I preached from this passage and probably got more “Amen’s” in this sermon than at any other time in my entire life. It does not mean that I preached any better; I was just responded to more vocally. Here is the situation, listen and watch for the worship dimensions to this. One of the things you need to know is that Jehoshaphat had a standing million-man army. The first thing he did was not to call the army, but rather he called for a fast. He had been restoring the temple.

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar” (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard and said, “O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, ‘If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.’”

Jehoshaphat is referencing Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple: “When there is a plague or a famine, or an army comes up against you, call upon Me in this place and I will hear you.” He continues in verse 10, “But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

I love the end of that prayer and using it in my marriage, my family, my ministry, as a nation, as a seminary, and also using it to help people process through difficult things in their lives. We are to cry out to God boldly and to say humbly, “We do not know what to do.” That is so anti-everything about the way we often do church. We say, “Here is what you do in this case. I have 12 steps for doing this. Here is what worked for this person, and I am sure it will work for you.” There is nothing wrong with some of that. But we need to say in our heart, “We really do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You, and we are waiting for You to show us.” The Lord could have said to send the million-man army. Sometimes He does that. But Jehoshaphat was not presumptive to think, “I have an army, I will handle this.” Instead he said, “I am the king of Israel who is accountable to a higher king. This is an issue not just about me. We are all going to gather together and fast and pray and wait to hear from the Lord. We are going to

have a big all-of-Judah worship service before deciding what to do.”

Verse 13 tells what happens: “All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph [one of the three families in the temple], as he stood in the assembly.” They are all waiting on the Lord. They fasted, they prayed, and they remember the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple. They are doing what God had instructed them to do: “Gather at the temple and cry out to Me when you have a problem.” They humbly waited upon God, and the Spirit of the Lord speaks through a prophet. Verse 15 continues, “He said: ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.”’” They cried out to God, and He gave them an answer. Did they like the answer? Did they believe that this was really from the Lord? Or were they going to go out and get slaughtered by their enemies? It still calls for faith to go out without the soldiers at the head. Verse 18 says,

Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and the people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army.

Here is a strategy: gather all the musicians, go against this vast army that we cannot stand against, and send the musicians first. Most instructors in warfare would not say to send musicians first. So they were praising the Lord for the splendor of His holiness as they went out at the head of the army. They were saying, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.” They were going out to battle and they were saying, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.” That is actually pretty heartening. It is encouraging, and it is a reminder. It caused them to remember who they were as they had faith in God, going out to the one whose love endures for His people forever. They were going to give thanks to Him as they went into this battle that God told them He was going to win without them raising a sword. Verse 22 continues, “As they began to sing and praise [where does worship end and war begin?], the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.” As they go out singing, the Lord has these three armies kill each other. Verse 24 says, “When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing and also articles of value—more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it.” These armies were not coming to do a little ambush. They were coming to take over. They had brought all their things with them.

Verse 26 goes on to say, “On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah [Valley of Praise],

where they praised the LORD. This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah to this day.” They keep having these prayer and praise times along the way. Jehoshaphat gathered them for that, he sends them out with that, and he sends them at the head of the army. The army is defeated, and they praise God. They gather the plunder, and they praise God. Continuing in verse 27, “Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the LORD had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lutes and trumpets.” Let us get the instruments out and have a full worship service now to celebrate what God has done. Then there is almost an understated footnote, “The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.” What an amazing application of what God had said through Solomon at the building of the temple: “When your enemies rise up against you or plague and famine comes, gather in this place, cry out to Me, and I will hear you and respond.”

We can see the relationship between the people of God gathering weekly for corporate public worship and the driving back of the enemies or advancing of the kingdom in these other six days. There are multiple places where God calls His people vocationally: families, neighborhoods, or around the world in the workplace. I think that is the application: we gather to hear from God how we are to live for Him and watch Him work in our lives the other six days of the week. Worship fuels kingdom advancement. Kingdom advancement necessitates ongoing worship. This is a wonderful passage. It preaches well to old folks and little kids. We did it here a couple summers ago. We sang the song, “Give thanks to the Lord, His love endures forever.” It is based on the same thing in one of the psalms. We had the children march around in the room as part of our going out to battle. I would read part of the passage, make a few comments, and we would sing another song. The little ones were there when they gathered in Jerusalem.

Under King Hezekiah you have restoration of temple worship and restoration of the Passover. There are a lot of ups and downs in the history of Israel and Judah. One of the things that we see is that they would lose track of the book of the Law. The temple would come into disrepair. The priests and the Levites would lead the people astray and the kings as well. False prophets would come, and then all of a sudden God had had enough. He would bring revival and restoration. They would discover the book of the Law and say, “We have not been worshiping God the way He says,” and they would tear their clothes. They would gather Israel and repent, fast, and pray. They would rebuild the temple, reinstitute the sacrifices, and get things back in the right order. Or they would say, “We were supposed to be celebrating the Passover every year. Oops! What do we do now?” So in 2 Chronicles 29, Hezekiah purifies the temple. In 2 Chronicles 30:1 it says, “Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month. They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem.” They had a problem.

This is an interesting exception to the regulative principle, of when you celebrate the Passover. It is in the first month, not the second month. They were also doing what the Law said about having all the different priests properly purified before celebrating the Passover. So they could not get it done in time. Should they wait a whole year? Or should they just wait one month and maybe do it in the second month instead of the first month? I wonder if any of them wondered, “Remember what happened when they carried the ark on the ox cart? I think we better wait until next year.” Someone else might have responded, “But we have just invited all the northern kingdom. We are getting things ready; we are doing the best we can. We have just discovered this; we have grieved it; we have repented of it. It seems

like the celebrating of the Passover is consistent with where God is taking us.”

Verse 4 says, “The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.” So they sent word to the north. They have this great celebration. Verse 15 says, “They slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the temple of the LORD. Then they took up their regular positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses, the man of God. The priests sprinkled the blood handed to them by the Levites. Since many in the crowd had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs for all those who were not ceremonially clean and could not consecrate their lambs to the LORD.” The priests were ashamed because they had not been performing their duties rightly according to the Law. You have some exceptions in practice to what was normal because of the extraordinary circumstances. The value of celebrating the Passover seemed to outweigh some of these matters that ordinarily should have been more closely attended to in that regard.

This is a narrative example of how the regulative principle is able to stretch for the sake of a greater biblical principle than the first month or second month. Ordinarily Passover is celebrated in the first month—that is the way God designed it. But it seemed good to the king and the people that it be celebrated in the second month. And the Lord seemed to approve of it by withholding direct judgment against them as He had done at other times, like with Uzzah. There is not a word of instruction that says, “When you cannot get ready in time it is all right to ignore the commandment to do it the first month.” There is not a prophet coming and saying that. It is not that way in the Law of Moses. There are greater principles of the importance of reinstating what has been neglected. It did not quite match all perfect timing or amount of time to be ceremonially pure, even as the heads of households normally slaughter the Passover lamb. Some of the priests had to do that for the families because they had not had enough time to get ready for that, according to the other aspects of the Law. They even had some Levites who were not priests sacrificing sacrificial animals in this same time period. They did this because they had gone through the necessary purification.

There are interesting exceptions in this time of King Hezekiah that, for the strict regulativist, seem to be a problem. But for those who are broad regulativists, you see this principle as valid but able to be stretched to meet God’s priorities. For a similar reason, I take exception to the Westminster Confession in my ordination vows in the presbytery I am in. The Westminster Confession says there should be a minister present, a teaching elder, for the right administration of the Lord’s Supper. I think ordinarily that should be the case. But I can envision a church, in some outlying area of Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, or somewhere where there is a congregation of people who are faithfully worshiping God. They have ruling elders, duly qualified and ordained, who are overseeing the ministry of the church. They may not be able to get a teaching elder to come for a long period of time to preach and oversee the administration of the Lord’s Supper. I am not convinced that the Westminster Confession is on absolutely commanded ground of Scripture, to say it must be a teaching elder who administers the sacrament, that a ruling elder is insufficient. I think a ruling elder is sufficient. Ordinarily I think it is wise and prudent to have a teaching elder who has further training and understanding of the sacraments to oversee it. Ordinarily I am for that, but I think it would be appropriate, under the oversight of duly qualified ruling elders without a teaching elder present, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This is because of the value of the sacrament as a means of grace to God’s people. It should not be neglected for long periods of time. It should be practiced under the oversight of the ruling elder. I think there are principles from this time of Hezekiah that are consistent with that. That is my conscience from Scripture in

relationship to my ordination vow in subscribing to the Confession. I also say I am unwilling to practice that because it is not the rule of the church. I will submit to the church's insistence that it has to be a teaching elder. I am not going to have a problem with ever violating that, because I am a teaching elder.

That is an example of some biblical principles of worship that are of greater value than every precise detail. You have to be careful, though, because some of these precise details that were not followed are important even when the hearts were celebrating God, like we saw with David in the last lesson. So some of these hermeneutical questions and applications are challenges. This is an example of how you adapt some of these things that are in a different framework and time in redemptive history. We are now in the time of the church, but we can still derive working principles for solving real life day-to-day ministry worship. It is a very real issue for people who are in outlying places and do not have teaching elders. There is a church in Indiana that has been without a pastor for a while. They want to have weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. They do not have it because they do not always have a teaching elder present as the guest preacher. But any time there is a teaching elder, I went two weeks ago, they want to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They are doing the best they can, given their irregular situation in which they do not have a pastor. They are trying to still be faithful to what they think are their priorities for worship.

We are not going to take a lot of time talking about the Psalter, but the Psalter is a very significant portion of Scripture as it relates to worship. It is the hymnbook of Israel. It continues to be part of the hymnbook of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an appropriate set of songs to be sung; they are inspired songs; how could we not sing them? But living where we do in the story after Pentecost before the second coming of Christ, it is not a sufficient hymnbook, because there is no explicit singing about our Savior. There are implicit, anticipatory, messianic psalms. But the content of what we sing as we look at heavenly worship is the song of the Lamb who was slain. There are psalms that may allude to that, but to say that we cannot sing the name of Jesus in new covenant worship seems to miss where we are in the history of redemption, in God's story for the ages. The answer to exclusive psalmody, which is the argument that we should sing only in the Psalms and which Presbyterians historically have helped promote, is not to never sing any psalms. Francis Schaeffer said, "The proper correction to an unbiblical principle or practice is not the equal and opposite unbiblical principle and practice." The answer to emotionalism is not rationalism. The answer to emotionalism is biblical emotion. The answer to rationalism is not emotionalism. It is biblically grounded, reasonable doctrine. The answer to exclusive psalmody is not no psalmody; the answer to exclusive psalmody would be what some are calling inclusive psalmody. I believe in inclusive psalmody; the hymnbook should include psalms, but not only psalms.

Calvin, as we will look more at later, felt in answer to Psalm 98 the need to restore music and psalm to corporate public worship in his day. He used the Psalter, the Ten Commandments, Simeon's song, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. He was an almost exclusive psalmist. But new musical expressions, he felt, were partly in fulfillment of Psalm 98, which says, "O sing a new song to the Lord." I think it is even more than what Calvin felt and practiced. I think "O sing a new song to the Lord" is the church in every generation, continuing to sing a new song to the Lord in their day that is consistent with the song that has come before and Scripture that is unchanging. But new expressions of the same unchanging Gospel song should come with every generation to every ethnic group to which the Gospel goes. There are opportunities for new expressions in the lives of people who have been grafted in by the grace of God.

One of the key and foundational reasons that Israel was sent into exile was their false worship. They were worshiping idols. They were also failing in the second tablet of the Law, the last six of the Ten

Commandments, in loving their neighbor well. They were oppressing the poor and practicing social injustice. For those two primary reasons, in the preaching of the prophets against the people of God, they were either destroyed in the northern kingdom by the Assyrians or carried away into captivity by the Babylonians. The temple itself was destroyed. This is severe judgment, particularly as it relates to worship. They believed as long as there was a Davidic king on the throne and an Aaronic priest offering sacrifices and the temple standing in Jerusalem, all was well. This is where we get the phrase, "At ease in Zion." They were forgetting about the issues of the heart and their walk with God along the way. They figured that everything else was being taken care of, so what is a little worshiping of some other idols along with it? What is wrong with offering our children in sacrifice? What is wrong with a little bit of that? We are still worshiping God too. We are still offering sacrifices; we still have a Davidic king. What is the big deal? It was a big deal, though. So, because He loved them, God chastened them and disciplined them. Ultimately His dwelling place is the heavenly Zion, so the earthly Zion could be destroyed without God Himself being destroyed. Isaiah 29 is the idea of people worshiping with their lips, but their hearts are far away. What you see in Psalm 137, for example, is a song that is written about not singing songs. That is interesting. This is a setting in which Jerusalem was destroyed. It says,

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars
we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem,
my highest joy.

We see that picture of the lament and the sadness. They are saying, "We cannot sing songs of joy because the temple is destroyed; Jerusalem is in ruins." Even the tormentors in Babylon were saying, "Sing one of your songs of Zion now." Even their captors recognized that singing songs of joy before their God in Zion was central to their practice of worshiping and loving their God well. Now they were saying they could not do it because of what had happened.

There is a return from captivity. The temple is rebuilt with a little bit of neglect along the way. They had the daily sacrifices going and started to build the temple. Then they got carried away with building their nice-paneled homes. The prophet Haggai encourages them to consider their ways and get busy about building the temple. How can you expect God to bless you in your house if you are not willing to build His house first? It is the Old Testament, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then your paneled houses will be added to you," to paraphrase Matthew 6 into Haggai and this time period. They go back and they rebuild the temple. There is not a lot of commentary in Ezra 2, but it names all the different people who came back. In verse 65 it says, "They also had 200 men and women singers." Where did that come from? It is the restoration of the worship of the temple. They are including the singers that David had implemented in his day, and now we have not only male but female singers. I will note that without drawing conclusions, except that it sounds like there were women singers in the

temple after the Exile in the time of restoration. The point I am making is that singing that was put on hold because of Zion was now restored.

One other place I would like to look at before we turn to the New Testament is Zephaniah. In Zephaniah 3:14-17 we read,

Sing, O Daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O Daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.
The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.
On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
“Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.
The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.”

That is talking about the restoration from captivity back to Jerusalem, but it is also talking about a lot more than that. Some of the promises here have partial fulfillment, I believe in that time period. But they await greater fulfillment in our time, and even beyond our time. It is the multi-layered aspect of Zion that the Scripture seems to carry forward as we saw in the book of Hebrews earlier. It says, “Do not let your hands hang limp.” There is a gracious restoring power of God with His people. You are not going to hang your harp on the poplar or willow tree forever. Do not let your hands hang limp in defeat. Remember who God is; this captivity is short-lived. Whatever you are going through, if you belong to Him, will not end in defeat but victory. Then there is the idea that God is with us. He is with us; He is mighty to save. He takes delight in us, He quiets us with His love, He rejoices over us with singing. I do not know how many times I read through the Bible and read right past that verse. It happened until David Hampton and Scott Wesley Brown put this to music and I got a recording of it. I heard it and said, “This is a beautiful song. It is an incredible idea that God is rejoicing over us with singing. He is mighty to save.” Then I saw in the insert Zephaniah 3. I looked up Zephaniah 3 and said, “Oh, this is in the Bible!” A beautiful song that lingers on certain phrases or passages biblically can actually bring to light certain key aspects of God’s Word that we miss when we read it silently to ourselves.

I heard a sermon by Scotty Smith on Zephaniah 3. He is the pastor of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee. He said that the picture of what is behind the word for “rejoice over you with singing” is actually moving rhythmically in circles while singing. Some people might call that dancing! The picture that I have is our now 27-year-old son, when he was a baby and I could hold him in my arms. Sometimes he would cry even though there was no reason for him to cry. I have this series of simple children’s songs like “Jesus Loves Me” and “Hush My Dear Lie Still in Slumber” to the tune of “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” They are simple little songs that I would sing through. On one occasion in particular I sang about five hoping he would be asleep by then. I would bounce while I was holding him and singing to him. I was trying to assure him that I loved him and that all was fine; I did not know what the problem was. He was in a good place in his father’s arms; I was rejoicing and

delighting over him even though he was crying. I would move around, sing, hold him, and say everything was all right. That is exactly the picture of this verse. It is how God loves, quiets, delights over, rejoices over, and sings over His dear children whom He loves and gave His Son for. That is the place He calls us to as His children.

Throughout most of my life I have been limited to thinking that worship is about what the people who are gathered sing. Then I began to see from Hebrews 2 that Jesus is singing with us. That puts a different spin on what is going on when we sing. The Father actually hears the Son singing, and that is why He accepts our singing. It is similar to praying. There is a unique dynamic that is going on when we gather in worship to sing and Christ sings with us. Though you are not literally hearing audible music, it is as if the Father responds to our singing by singing back over us. One of the things that Scotty Smith encourages people in his congregation to do from time to time, not all at the same time, is to stop singing and listen to the congregational song as though Jesus is singing with them and God is joining in response. There is that singing over us like this image of the child that is a dynamic of God's presence with us.

It is appropriate to understand that while we cannot always take each individual instance in the Old Testament as normative, they are worthy of consideration of the overall picture of our worship this side of the resurrection of Christ. There is a tension that we are left with, though. We start at creation and end in the new creation. There is the first coming, the second coming, and all of eternity of the new Jerusalem. You have the garden, the sacrificial system under Moses, and the temple under David and Solomon. You are progressing. We live after Pentecost, somewhere between it and the new Jerusalem. We do not know whether we are almost there or whether there is still a long, long time before we get almost there. Many things inform our gathering in our churches. There are certain aspects of intimacy with God, fellowship with Him, and all of life as worship that we picked up from the beginning that still carry forward. There are certain aspects of the temple as God's dwelling place and the sacrifice of blood necessary to come near to God that carry forward. It looks different because we do not need the blood of bulls and goats. But we know we need the blood of Christ to dwell in here. It still informs our understanding of this event of the cross. We see expression of worship and calling out to God that we looked at with Hezekiah. We have the psalms. They are not our whole hymnbook, but we continue to sing them as part of the inspired hymns of the faith. There are matters of worship that carry forward, but in the coming through the cross of Christ they are transformed. They take on new significance. They are fulfilled and adjusted. We had circumcision and Passover; now we have baptism and the Lord's Supper. We had bloody rights and now bloodless rights because of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

All across this time you have something that is happening in the heavens where the ultimate realities are. Even in the glorious day of the Old Testament, Solomon is directing the people of God to not look just to this beautiful temple that he is overseeing the building of, but to see God in His glory that is way beyond that. How can we do anything less in our local gatherings here? We are told we have come to heaven when we come to worship, because Christ links that heavenly worship and earthly worship. We stand where we are, and the focus is on certain things that are there in the New Testament compared to the Old Testament. We are informed from the Old Testament and from Christ when we live in this particular moment. We cannot ignore what has come before, but we need to let it be filtered through what has happened since that time to where we now live. The primary filter is the first coming of Christ, and all that relates to it. When I think of that I think of the incarnation, His perfect life, the crucifixion, the resurrection, His ascension, and Pentecost as all part of the person and work of Christ. It impacts who we are now. It is the major filter through which these other antecedent aspects of worship must come and be adjusted by or fulfilled in or restored by. There is a lot of restorative garden along the way, being in the presence of God. That is what we are on the way toward. There is the picture of the men up

on the mountain, the 70 elders and Moses, seeing God and eating and drinking with Him. That is more like what happens in the garden and in the end. There is a little taste, a pointer, of what these things that He is doing here will ultimately result in. He is going to restore what was started in the garden, and it will be fulfilled in the end.