

OT Celebration and NT Worship

By Dennis Prutow

Celebration and Worship: An Old Testament Word Study lending perspective to our understanding of contemporary worship questions. By Celebration I mean *culturally conditioned worship settings*. By Worship I mean *structured heaven directed worship settings*. The former are occasional meetings while the latter regular stated meetings. The principles reviewed in the previous studies lead us in the direction of making this distinction as it is drawn out in the following study.

- a. The Hebrew word in question [תָּבַח] is used 17 times in the Old Testament. It is translated either tambourine(s) or timbrel(s) in the New American Standard Version.
- b. The references are as follows: Genesis 31:27, Exodus 15:20, Judges 11:34, 1 Samuel 10:5, 18:6, 1 Chronicles 13:8, Job 21:12, Psalm 81:2, 149:3, 150:4, Isaiah 5:12, 24:8, 30:32, Jeremiah 31:4, Ezekiel 28:13.
- c. The first reference, Genesis 31:27, indicates that singing with tambourines and harps or lyres was a customary way in those times and in that culture to celebrate a joyful occasion.
- d. We find a similar thing in Job 21:12 (Context is Job 21:1-16) with reference to the wicked. The way they commonly celebrated was with the timbrel and harp, and with song. In other words, we get a picture of a secular or culturally conditioned celebration.
- e. In Isaiah 5:8-12, God upbraids Israel for its worldliness. The people engage in secular celebrations. Is the idea of a party or a celebration evil in and of itself? No! On the other hand, they turn their backs on God, verse 12. Rejecting God is evil.
- f. Judgment includes the silencing of this 'partying' and the silencing of the 'gaiety of the tambourines' (Isaiah 24:8). The culturally conditioned type of reveling comes to an end. It comes to an end, not because it is evil, but because Israel is evil. God's judgment simply removes this joy and this expression of joy.
- g. We see Israel once again enter into this kind of celebration in Isaiah 30:32. When Assyria is judged, Israel will rejoice with tambourines. Note the occasional nature of this celebration.
- h. In like manner, the promise was that when Israel was restored from exile, there would be reason to celebrate. "You will again take up your tambourines" (Jeremiah 31:4).
- i. I omit Ezekiel 28:13 because the modern versions do not translate the Hebrew word in question as a musical instrument but as a setting for precious stones.
- j. Given the common use of tambourines in the culture of the time, it is not surprising that Miriam takes up the timbrel to celebrate the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians. Exodus 15:20. Worship? Similarly 1 Samuel

10:5 and 1 Chronicles 13:8 Compare 1 Chronicles 15:13 and the more direct elements of God's sanctuary. All of these are occasional.

k. Similar circumstances are seen in Judges 11:34 where Jephtha's daughter celebrates his victory over Ammon and in 1 Samuel 18:6 where there is celebration after David's defeat of the Philistines. These circumstances provide the occasions for these culturally shaped celebrations.

l. The Stated Worship of God's people, on the other hand, is heaven centered, heaven directed (directed to heaven and directed by heaven), heaven flavored, and Christ tintured.

m. Celebration, although it may have worshipful elements, is more world directed and world flavored. It is culturally conditioned.

n. There is a place for celebration. It differs from worship. We should understand and teach the difference. We build on the theology of formal Old Testament worship in the Temple rather than upon the pattern of Old Testament celebrations. In the Reformed tradition, for example, weddings are not considered Worship Services. They are not Stated Meetings but Celebrations with worshipful elements and are culturally conditioned.

o. Our aim is to draw people toward heaven and away from the world through heaven directed worship. Our aim is not to culturally condition our worship. We ought not to be more concerned about being connected to the culture than being connected to heaven. Think this through with regard to our definitions of worship and the worshiping assembly.

p. The Stated Meetings of the Old Testament temple worship provide the theological and biblical foundation for the Stated Meetings of worship in the church. We should not take the occasional celebrations of the Old Testament for our pattern of worship. We therefore worship as God directs.

q. But we usually take a contrary posture: Whatever God does not forbid He permits. Compare the two positions. Think this through with regard to our definitions of worship and the worshiping assembly. Is the latter position presumption? Remember Esther.

r. Compare the two positions once again:

In worship, whatever God appoints He permits (Positive Statement).

In worship, whatever God does not appoint He forbids (Negative Statement).

or

In worship, whatever God does not forbid, He permits.