

The February CFAMC Devotional Page

A cautionary tale, with a happy ending (if we learn from it)!

I was struck last month with this verse in the Bible:

[I Chronicles 13:8](#) ó And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

Sounds like a choir and orchestra to me, busy praising the Lord with power. In my other life as a gospel musician, that would be described as a "hallelujah good time," with piano, organ, guitar, and a drummer, with folks in the choir and congregation singing along and just "getting happy" in their worship. Had you walked into all that, you would have thought that these were the most Spirit-filled, in-the-will-of-God folks on earth at that particular moment.

There was just one problem.

[Oxen and Wagon](#), courtesy of [Oarabile Mudongo](#) and [Wikimedia Commons](#)
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In I Chronicles 13:8; King David and all Israel were singing and playing with all their might. By I Chronicles 13:10, God had struck a man dead in His anger. Now how would YOU feel, as a composer or music director (and King David was both), if that happened during YOUR service?

Notice I did not say, "worship service." I have been following Thru the Bible Radio with Dr. J. Vernon McGee through I and II Chronicles, and something struck me this morning: When God wants to record that His people are worshipping and praising Him, He has no trouble saying so. Consider another king, namely Jehoshaphat, when he received the word of the Lord, along with His people.

2 Chronicles 20:18-19

¹⁸ And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

¹⁹ And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

The next day, God went out and did serious battle for Jehoshaphat and his people, and they kept the praise and worship going (in verse 28, we again meet the orchestra, the psalteries and harps and trumpets, as the people go to the temple). God further rewarded the remainder of the reign of Jehoshaphat with peace. God's pleasure is a powerful thing upon a people and again, He has no problem letting us know what pleases Him.

Now return to I Chronicles 13:8 and there is singing and playing with many instruments and emotional fervor and but there is not a word about worship and praise. That omission is critical; again, two verses later, God strikes a man and poor Uzza! and dead in his tracks. God also has no problem letting what displeases Him be known either, but what could have caused this outbreak of His wrath in the middle of what looks like a hallelujah good time?

It all started with a composer and music director who was also king and King David. His motives were right; he desired to bring the ark of the Lord back home to the capital of Israel, Jerusalem. Not since before the reign of Saul had the ark, sign of God's covenant and power, been in a place central for all of the people of Israel so that regular worship could be established in one place. It had been more than 40 years. The king desired to set that right and nothing wrong there.

Here is the part that we composers and music directors of today should keep an eye on.

Chronicles 13:1-4

1. And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.

² And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of

Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us:

³ And let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul.

⁴ And all the congregation said that they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

All the people were pleased with the king's plan, so the oxen and the cart were made ready, and the ark was on its way, and the singing and playing began! but a man would end up dead that day. King David had consulted his people, but had overlooked two key steps; he had not prayed, and he had not consulted the word of God, which had specific instructions on how the ark was to be moved that are as clear as day. Thus, Uzza died, and this sad note was left behind:

I Chronicles 13:12 ó And David was afraid of God that day, saying, "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?"

Instead of joy, there came fear, grief, confusion, all because, as the king said later in I Chronicles 15:13, "we sought Him not after the due order." King David did do the right thing by I Chronicles 15, but oh, the cost!

All Scripture is given us for our instruction, so this study has really bored into me these past few weeks. Because I sit as composer and director in three music worlds ó art music, gospel music, and hymnody ó I see first-hand that we humans tend to make the same mistakes over and over again, no matter our ethnic background or denomination. As a director, there is a constant temptation to just please choir members and musicians with selecting what they feel like singing and playing; one suffers for disallowing "favorite songs" just because there are a few lyrics that are not Biblical. As a composer, it is constant work, after the great and powerful rush of receiving new music has passed, to go back and double-check not only for musical excellence, but doctrinal excellence, and for how well the two match up. Often times, one has to apply "He must increase, but I must decrease" upon one's own music so that key words here or there might be better heard and understood, so that there is no mistake of what is paramount in the song. As a composer *and* director, the responsibility becomes even heavier; you have an insight of what the power of music is from creation to its going forth, and you see that an error in either arena will multiply itself out many, many times! only prayer and obedient study of the Word of God can help us avoid those errors!

I say, to my great grief, that I have endured my share of I Chronicles 13:8 services ó emotionally fervent, but as dead spiritually as Uzza was physically by I Chronicles 13:10. And you all have too; if you ever wonder how it is that people can go to a building, do their church thing with zeal, and return to the rest of the week the same gossiping, manipulating, backbiting, dishonest, hurtful people they were when they went in the building, you also have had a I Chronicles 13:8 experience! Singing and playing does not change anyone ó but worship, the practice of knowing

God for Who He is and responding appropriately, WILL CHANGE US. We are responsible, as composers, and musicians, and directors, for assisting worship, not hindering it ó our choices of what to write and what to share with others are a matter of deep concern to God, a matter that should engage our earnest prayer and study of the Word of God. King David found himself with a dead man on his hands for not attending to prayer and study ó are we in a nation of many dead local churches (loud or quiet) because we have not attended to our responsibilities?

I promised a happy ending; the sweet psalmist of Israel made a second attempt to bring the ark home to Jerusalem, and this time he got it right, scrupulously consulting the Lord and His Word and leading the people of Israel in the work. That was I Chronicles 15; in chapter 16, the Bible records an entire psalm of praise (28 verses!) the king wrote to thank, praise, and worship God, and that all his people sang. A whole nation, thanking, praising, and worshipping God: that was the result for King David, when he got the first part ó honoring and seeking God through prayer and obedient study of the Word ó right! That likewise can be our happy ending, every time and every place we rise to bring forth new music or choose old in God's service! The choice is ours!

Epilogue: this weekend I have experienced something of the I Chronicles 15 and 16 worship experience. I have been selected as a guest director to one of San Francisco's most important gospel choirs, and what struck me as I was sitting at rehearsal Saturday was the first name of the general director ó David, full name David Lewis. He does very well by his famous kingly namesake; he is a man with great, fervent love and dedication for the Lord, and he is a world-class musician and director.

Mr. Lewis's leadership provided me a study in contrasts for this Page, for I was with him and the perennial directors as they worked out the standards of song selection. We prayed, we fellowshiped, we affirmed the need for Biblical soundness in every song ó my two songs, thank God, met the main standard! So did everyone else's, so, at the first rehearsal, we just skipped over I Chronicles 13 to I Chronicles 15 and 16! Of course, we were not an entire nation, but it is no small thing when 60 people can fully engage physically, emotionally, and spiritually upon music that honors God, and it is no small thing to sit, as composer, pianist, and director, and be part of that happening through one of your songs. None of that would have been possible without a lead director who had settled in his heart to honor God through every choice of music ó and seeing that has encouraged me in all realms that God has permitted me the blessing of music to remain faithful, to seek to please Him first and foremost in every composition and every selection of music for those I have responsibility to serve. I pass this on to all of you to encourage you as well!