What is a Lyre in the Bible? (1 Samuel 16:16, 23)

In the Bible, musical instruments are often categorized into three main groups, each serving a purpose in worship and praise:

1. Wind instruments: These include the trumpet, flute, horn, and ram's horn. These instruments were often used to announce important events or to call people to worship (e.g., *Numbers 10:1-10*).
2. Percussion instruments: Instruments like tambourines, cymbals, drums, and bells. These were often used to create rhythm and joy in worship, as seen in *Psalm 150*.
3. String instruments: Instruments like the harp, lyre, zither, and santuri. These instruments produced their sound through plucking or striking the strings, and were closely associated with personal and communal worship.

The lyre is a string instrument commonly referenced in biblical texts. It was played by plucking its strings with fingers or a small tool, and was a key instrument in the worship of God. The Jewish lyre typically had ten strings, often made from the intestines of a lamb (a symbol of purity and sacrifice).

To see how it's played, you can watch this video on YouTube:
Watch the video

David and the Lyre:
David is most famously associated with the lyre in the Bible, using

it to soothe King Saul when an evil spirit, sent by God, tormented him. This highlights the therapeutic and spiritual power of music, particularly in the context of God's sovereignty and grace.

1 Samuel 16:16 (NIV):

> *"So let our lord command his servants to search for someone who can play the lyre. When the evil spirit from God comes on you, he will play it, and you will feel better..."*

1 Samuel 16:23 (NIV): "

> *Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."*

Theologically, this passage emphasizes God's sovereignty in allowing both good and evil spirits to have influence over His creation (as seen in *1 Samuel 16:14*), and the power of music as a

means of spiritual healing and deliverance.

The Levites and Temple Worship:
The Levites, the priestly tribe of Israel, used the lyre and other instruments to praise God during the construction and dedication of the temple. This underscores the importance of music in corporate worship and the honor given to God through the arts.

2 Chronicles 5:12 (NIV):

> *“The Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps, and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.”*

Theologically, this passage reflects the holistic nature of worship—body, mind, and spirit—being expressed in song and music, bringing glory to God in the fullness of creation.

Music in the New Creation:

The Bible also points to music in the future, in the new creation, when those who have overcome will praise Christ with their harps (lyres). This final victory of God’s people underscores the eternal nature of worship and the role of music in it.

Revelation 15:2-3 (NIV):

> “I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps (lyres) given them by God.
> And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: ‘Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, King of the nations.’”

Theologically, this passage points to the victory of God’s people over evil and the eternal worship that will take place in His presence. Music will continue to be a central aspect of worship in the new heavens and new earth, as it has always been in the worship of the people of God.

Should We Use Lyres in Our Worship Today?

The Bible teaches that all musical instruments are appropriate for use in worship, as long as they are played in a manner that glorifies God. The type of instrument—whether a drum, guitar, xylophone, zither, or lyre—is not the key focus. Instead, the way we use our music in praise, in beauty, and in holiness is what matters most.

Psalm 150:1-6 (NIV):

> *“Hallelujah!*
> *Praise God in his sanctuary;*
> *praise him in his mighty heavens.*
> *Praise him for his acts of power;*
> *praise him for his surpassing greatness.*
> *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,*
> *praise him with the harp and lyre;*
> *praise him with the tambourine and dancing,*
> *praise him with the strings and flute;*
> *praise him with the clash of cymbals,*

> *praise him with resounding cymbals.*
> *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*
> *Hallelujah!”*

Psalm 150 invites all of creation to join in the universal praise of God. Music, as an expression of the beauty and creativity given to us by God, is an essential part of worship. It is not the specific instruments that matter, but that we use them to honor God in spirit and truth (see *John 4:24*). Our music should be an offering to God, reflecting His glory and majesty, whether in public or private worship.

Conclusion:

In light of biblical teaching, we can conclude that using instruments such as the lyre, or any other musical instrument, is not only permissible but encouraged in worship, as long as it is done with a heart of reverence and holiness. Theologically, music plays a vital role in bringing us closer to God, expressing our love, gratitude, and praise to Him.

Blessings to you.

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