

The Musical Instruments of David

Nehemiah 12:36

INTRODUCTION:

1. Adam Clarke, whose scholarly works were produced over forty years, and who likely was the most renowned scholar of the Methodist Church, wrote: "I believe that David was not authorized by the Lord to introduce that multitude of musical instruments into the Divine worship of which we read; and I am satisfied that his conduct in this respect is most solemnly reprehended by this prophet; and I farther believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is *without the sanction and against the will* of God; and that they are *sinful*."¹
2. Does Nehemiah suggest that the instruments were devised by David?

DISCUSSION:

I. Occurrences

- A. The expression "instruments of David" is found three times in the Old Testament (twice in 2 Chron. 29:26, 27; once in Neh. 12:36).
- B. The phrase "song to the Lord" is distinguished from the "instruments of David" in the Chronicles text.
- C. Musical instruments are never said to be "instruments of the Lord" (cf. 2 Chron. 7:6).

II. Conclusion

- A. The matter is controversial and murky, but really a non-issue.
- B. The real question is not whether David introduced the instruments on his own initiative or at the bidding of God. It is instead: Are mechanical instruments of music authorized by God for worship in the church?
- C. New Testament authority for the practice does not exist.
- D. "Although Josephus tells of the wonderful effects produced in the Temple by the use of instruments of music, the first Christian were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice."²

¹ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, n.d.), IV:684. Emphasis in the original.

² *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 651.