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## The Voice of the Singers at the Watering Places: Victory Songs as a Celebration of Recreation

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## The Voice of the Singers at the Watering Places: Victory Songs as a Celebration of Recreation

### Abstract

Victory songs were sung by women to welcome home the men from victorious war. Some prophetic variants appeared from these songs that had a theology of salvation and recreation. Beside the message of the songs, the context of these songs also show that recreation was a major theme of these musical compositions. Warfare was about the expansion of creation from an ordered center in the Ancient Near East. For Israel the center was Yahweh's presence with Israel being a new Eden. Recreation of the chaotic lands around Israel required that Israel went to war to subdue those lands and people. The songs were sung at cultic sites instruments that were associated with creation and fertility. The association of recreation and victory is found throughout the Old Testament, apocrypha, and into the New Testament and highlights the relationship of humans to the Divine Warrior who saves and recreates His people. When the Divine Warrior defeats His enemies and saves His people the only proper response is praise.

### Keywords

Victory Songs, Recreation, Frame-Drum, Holy War

### Cover Page Footnote

M.A. in Biblical Studies

## Introduction

Music and singing have an ancient heritage in the Bible, being respectively founded in Gen. 4 by Jubal and (probably) Naamah.<sup>1</sup> According to medieval Jewish commentators, there also existed an equally ancient association between music and war, as Jubal's inspiration for rhythm was the pounding of Tubal-Cain's hammer while he made weapons for Lamech.<sup>2</sup> This association is also possibly evident in Canaanite literature, as Kothar-wa-Khasis was the god who forged marvelous weapons for gods and mortals and may have been associated with the song.<sup>3</sup> The Bible presents this connection through its first explicit song, Exod. 15, which takes place after Yahweh waged a successful war against Pharaoh at the Red Sea. This song marks the first Biblical occurrence of a "victory song." These songs celebrated the victories won by Israel and Yahweh,<sup>4</sup> generally when the army returned home from war. In the historical narratives, they are accompanied by dance, the playing of the תבן (frame-drum), and are sung by women: Miriam, Deborah, Jephthah's daughter, Hannah, the women who greet Saul and David, and Philistine women.<sup>5</sup> There is one notable male exception in 2 Sam. 22, though there is neither dance nor a תבן. Victory songs are also used by the authors of over twenty psalms and prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. The songs are seen throughout Second Temple Literature, such as Judith, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Maccabees, and the New Testament. Within the New Testament, they appear first when Mary sings a victory song in Luke 1:46-55.<sup>6</sup> They make their final appearance in the last explicitly mentioned "song" of

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Meyers, "Naamah 1," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Annie F. Caubet, "Music and Dance in the World of the Bible," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 574.

<sup>3</sup> Annie F. Caubet, "Tubal-Cain, Père des Forgerons," *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* 2014: 292.

<sup>4</sup> There has been no strong consensus on what defines a "victory song," as many scholars have differing viewpoints on which songs of the Bible classify as such depending on various appeals to content, *sitz im leben*, and form. Because of the broad scope of victory songs (as will be discussed), no definition is entirely satisfactory to cover all these different areas. As such, this paper will use the following definition for what classifies as a victory song: a song that has a *sitz im leben* of after a battle or uses military imagery to celebrate a victory.

<sup>5</sup> Eunice Blanchard Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel," PhD Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 15.

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen from both the military language of the song, and the fact that the song is inspired by the Song of Hannah, which is classified as a victory song. Mary Catherine Nolan, "The Magnificat, Canticle of a Liberated People: A Hermeneutical Study of Luke 1:46-55."

the Bible in Rev. 15:3-4. This song mirrors Exod. 15 and is a victory song sung along the sea of glass by those who had triumphed over the beast.<sup>7</sup> It is the typological fulfillment of the Song of the Sea in the way that the Lamb's deliverance is the typological fulfillment of the deliverance at the Reed Sea.<sup>8</sup>

Previous studies on victory songs have tended to focus on source criticism or ethnomusicology. The former has been a focus as several of the victory songs (namely Exod. 15, Judg. 5, and Hab. 3) are considered among the oldest texts in the Bible,<sup>9</sup> while the latter "studies the musician, music, and function and status of each in a particular culture and compares it to other cultures."<sup>10</sup> Both methods have their merits, but look at the victory songs only in relation to their conceived time of composition and performance rather than encompassing material from across the whole Bible to gain an understanding of the theological role of victory songs in the finished text. However, when the whole Old Testament is consulted, alongside the cognitive environment of the Ancient Near East, there appear recognizable overlaps in themes and ideas. This paper seeks to unearth these themes by looking at the role of context in determining meaning. The two kinds of context looked at will be symbolic context and social context. The symbolic context will look at victory songs as the conclusion of warfare and, thus, how warfare gives meaning to said songs. The social context will look at the singers, the location of the songs' performances, and the instrument used and how these factors also help determine meaning. For this, the historical songs will be mainly focused on. The content of Israelite victory songs will also be looked at, with lyrics and themes from the historical songs, Psalms, and Prophets (especially Isaiah) to find that throughout the Bible, victory songs were seen as acts of jubilation by the community of Israel that celebrate Yahweh's acts of salvation and recreation in their lives and the land around them.

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Investigating the World Behind the Text by Exegesis; The World in Front of the Text by Interpretive Inquiry," PhD Diss., University of Dayton, 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation Revised Edition, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 211.

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 739.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition," 16.

### The Historical and Biblical Development of the Victory Song

Victory songs are unique as their form and context transform through the Hebrew Bible. They originated as songs performed by women to celebrate the homecoming of the hosts of Israel from war (hereafter referred to as the “folk tradition”). These are Gen. 4:23-24,<sup>11</sup> Judg. 11:34, and 1 Sam. 18:7; 21:11; 29:5 (with implications in 2 Sam. 1:20, and Jer. 31:4). These songs tended to be short and more human-focused. Prophetesses and prophets took these songs and modified them to produce longer versions that glorified Yahweh (“prophetic songs”); examples include Ex. 15:1-21, Judg. 5, 1 Sam. 2:1-10, Jer. 31, and Hab. 3. These prophetic songs inspired the writing of more victory songs which would be incorporated into the Temple Cult and entirely celebrated Yahweh (“cult songs”).<sup>12</sup> In Longman’s view, Pss. 18, 21, 24, 29, 47, 68, 76, 96, 97, 98, 114, 124, 125, 136 (possibly 20, 46, 66, 93 and 118) are all victory songs.<sup>13</sup>

Historically, the Israelite conception of the women-led victory song tradition possibly has its roots in the 12-10<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>14</sup> when it was in use by the Canaanites, who transmitted it to the Phoenicians, who then spread it across the Mediterranean as far away as sites like Ibiza<sup>15</sup> and also possibly to Cyprus and Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Most of the non-cultic Biblical victory songs were composed during “the

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<sup>11</sup> This is the sword-song of Lamech. Though not technically a victory song as it bears none of the distinguishing characteristics of the genre other than it is about a marital victory, it still is worth looking at because it is playing with the context of victory songs. Lamech sings about his martial prowess to his wives with the probable expectation that his wives will sing back, but the text remains silent on any response. See Steven T. Mann, “Let there be Cain: A Clash of Imaginations in Genesis 4,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46, no. 1 (2021): 92.; Carol Meyers, “Zillah” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 169.

<sup>12</sup> Folk, prophetic, and cult songs all show such differing *sitz im leben* that they would not classify as the same genre according to the rules set out by Hermann Gunkel, “Jesaja 33, Eine Prophetische Liturgie,” *ZAW* (1924): 182-183. However, because we can see that these forms are all related to each other, we shall refer to all these genres as “victory songs.”

<sup>13</sup> Tremper Longman III, “Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 3 (September 1984): 274.

<sup>14</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> Mireia López-Bertran, and Agnès Garcia-Ventura, “Music, Gender, and Ritual in the Ancient Mediterranean: Revisiting the Punic Evidence,” *World Archaeology* 44, no. 3 (September 2012): 394.

<sup>16</sup> Carol L. Meyers, “Of Drums and Damsels: Women’s Performance in Ancient Israel,” *The Biblical Archeologist* 54, no. 1 (March 1991): 22. Some take up the idea that the Egyptian and Cyprian traditions developed independently from the Canaanite version. For such a view see Sarit Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses: Drumming and Gender in Iron Age II Israel* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007), 102.

Heroic Age”<sup>17</sup> (Biblically Exod. through the early chapters of 1 Sam.,<sup>18</sup> archeologically, the late Bronze Age and Iron Age I<sup>19</sup>). They comprised a major component of this era’s literature.<sup>20</sup> This was a period of great change for Canaan as Egypt’s hegemony in the region was broken, and both the Philistines and Israelites came to inhabit the coast and central highlands, respectively.<sup>21</sup> These women-led songs praised the leader of the war party, be it Yahweh, king, or tribal chief,<sup>22</sup> and ushered the whole community into a celebration of Yahweh’s saving power and might in the war against forces superior to Israel.<sup>23</sup> They might have also served as propaganda to intimidate the enemy, as the Philistines heard the song of 1 Sam. 18:7 and sung it to illustrate their fear of David in 21:11 and 29:5.

During the Monarchy period (Iron Age II), women supported David’s bid for power and brought their songs to the court of David in Jerusalem (if they were not there already). It was here that the victory songs “became part of Israel’s national literature” and were stored to either become part of the sanctuary liturgy themselves or influence the writing of future cultic victory songs.<sup>24</sup> During this time, the folk songs died off in the Biblical text. However, the sheer amount of terracotta figurines depicting women drummers found in Iron Age II Israel suggests that the folk tradition survived in history until the Exile.<sup>25</sup> These terracotta figures have been found in a wide variety of contexts, such as tombs, temples, and public buildings. These indicate that women drummers served in some official role.<sup>26</sup> One of these is found in the “tomb of the horsemen,” a tomb from Achzib where women drummer figurines were found alongside horse-archer figurines, probably indicating a belief that the horsemen would protect the deceased in the afterlife against all manners of foes and that the women figures would welcome the warriors home with song and dance after their victory.<sup>27</sup> Placements such as this suggest that by Iron Age II, the folk tradition had taken on

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<sup>17</sup> Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (London: Vision Press, 1969), 164.

<sup>18</sup> Victor H. Matthews, *The History of Bronze and Iron Age Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 96.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Mark S. Smith, “Warfare Song as Warfare Ritual,” in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritzel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 166.

<sup>21</sup> Matthews, *The History of Bronze and Iron Age Israel*, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 173.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Yap, “The Function of the Women’s Victory Song in 1 Samuel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 2 (June 2022): 280.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-220.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

a syncretistic flavor, with Paz suggesting that it had become associated with the fertility cult.<sup>28</sup>

Biblically, the Heroic Age songs were comprised of folk and prophetic songs. The former was centered on the human figures who participated in the battle and possibly were simple short couplet-length songs that were repeated indefinitely.<sup>29</sup> The latter are all much longer than the folk song and have a shared focus on Yahweh. Miriam is called a prophet in Exodus 15:20 and leads the Song of Miriam and the Song of the Sea.<sup>30</sup> Deborah is called a prophet in Judges 4:4 and leads Deborah's Song. Hannah is considered a prophet in the Talmud<sup>31</sup> because she acts in the prophetic in her song by looking forward to the king.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses*, 97.

<sup>29</sup> Rita Jean Burns, "Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam," PhD Diss., Marquette University, 25.

<sup>30</sup> The Biblical placement of the two songs encourages the idea that Moses composed and sung the Song of the Sea first and that Miriam and the women repeated that first couplet as a response to it. However, in recent studies there has been a change to see Miriam as the author of both songs, notably by F.M. Cross, and D.N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14, no. 4 (1955): 237. Proponents of this idea generally hold that two traditions emerged about the authorship of the Song of the Sea and that the editor reconciled this by giving Moses the main song and Miriam an echo of it. Such a view is shown by Athayla Brenner, and Fokkeliën Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 38. However, the lack of female identifiers in the intricate poetic structure seems to indicate that Moses was always the original singer as noted by Hannah S. An, "A Canonical Reconsideration of the Song at the Sea (Exod 15:1-21): The Song of Moses or the Song of Miriam?" *Canon & Culture* 10, no. 1 (2016): 30-31. Though it simply could be that this song was meant to be a response that was sung by the whole community as suggested by Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Skokie: Varda Books, 2005), 173-182. Given both Moses and Miriam's status as prophets, it is not unlikely that both helped compose the song with Miriam and the women starting the song and Moses and the men responding to it.

<sup>31</sup> Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 141.

<sup>32</sup> There is much debate as to if Hannah's song is a product of Iron Age I or an editorial addition of a monarchy period song. This is due to the last couplet that mentions the king in a time when Israel is kingless. The form of the poem is too well knit for simply that couplet alone to be a late addition, as noted by Theodore J. Lewis, "The Textual History of the Song of Hannah: 1 Samuel II 1-10," *Vetus Testamentum* 44, no. 1 (1994): 43-44. Some say that Hannah is operating in the prophetic here, as she is named among the prophets. Such a view is taken by Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 63. Others note the negative portrayal of kingship throughout Judges and early 1 Samuel, so it would not make sense for it to be a contemporary piece. This view is perhaps best argued by Samuel B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2016), 67-68. Regardless of its composition date, it is evident that we are meant to see Hannah as a prophet because of it, even if she is not explicitly named as one.

These prophetesses adopted the popular genre of song for their own purposes (as customary among prophets<sup>33</sup>) to create a special kind of victory song that gives praise to Yahweh.<sup>34</sup> These songs became of the utmost importance to Israel as they were “vehicles for Israel’s theology of liberation.”<sup>35</sup> They also fostered ethnic identity<sup>36</sup> by uniting Israel as a people whose true identity is found in their king and savior, Yahweh,<sup>37</sup> and served as taunt songs against the faithless men who either fought Yahweh or did not take up arms with Him.<sup>38</sup> These songs deserved special remembrance and were either written down and stored in tent sanctuaries like Shiloh<sup>39</sup> or passed down from one woman singer to the next through the generations so that the songs may never be forgotten.<sup>40</sup>

After the establishment of the monarchy, the folk victory songs are almost non-existent in the Bible (despite their aforementioned historical reality), though the cult and prophetic songs survive through Psalms and the Prophets. This is perhaps due to the syncretistic nature of the folk songs, as the fertility cult held a greater grip on Israel. Paz believes the fertility drumming was a result of women’s critique of being excluded from the growing monotheistic religion that was taking hold in Israel. However, the Biblical evidence suggests that this is part of the wider fall from monotheism into polytheism depicted by the writers of Kings. With this growing fall (victory songs possibly incorporating and being associated with polytheistic and pagan ideas or increasingly focusing on the human element), the Biblical display of victory songs moves from the folk tradition to the cultic and prophetic songs, where the focus of the songs remains Yahweh. The cultic songs mimicked the folk songs in that they celebrated the return of the Divine Warrior to his abode, the temple. Through these songs, Israel gave praise to Yahweh, who led the heavenly hosts back to the Temple after warfare.<sup>41</sup> In the latter prophetic songs, the singers await the coming day when the earth will be recreated, and Israel will be saved and made new,<sup>42</sup> a theme that will be returned to later.

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy C. Lee, *Hannevi’ah and Hannah: Hearing Women Biblical Prophets in a Woman’s Lyrical Tradition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015), 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 252.

<sup>36</sup> Sendery, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 167.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob L. Wright, *War, Memory, and National Identity in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 208.

<sup>38</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 225-227.

<sup>39</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 170.

<sup>41</sup> Longman, “Psalm 98,” 272.

<sup>42</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 97.



Beyond the Hebrew Bible, victory songs appear in several places in the Apocrypha. Judith sings a song that is noticeably inspired by Exod. 15 and Judg. 5 in Jdth. 16, after her triumph over Assyria.<sup>43</sup> Several songs are sung throughout Maccabees, such as 1 Macc. 13:51, where men sing as they enter a conquered Jerusalem or 1 Macc. 14:4-15 where Simon is praised for bringing peace to Israel and sanctifying the Temple. The War Scroll gives instructions on the song to be sung by the armies of Israel after victory. The New Testament also shows victory songs, although the songs change somewhat. They are not songs that celebrate the triumph of physical armies over physical foes but rather celebrate the ultimate victory. Christ has been born, died, rose again, has won over evil, and ushered in an era of peace. Such examples include Mary's Song, Zechariah's Song,<sup>44</sup> the Angelic Song,<sup>45</sup> and the final hymn of Revelation 19:1-8<sup>46</sup> to name a few. The things that the victory songs of Israel anticipated have been fulfilled through Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Symbolic World of Victory Songs in the Ancient Near East**

In his study of rituals, Gorman uses the term symbolic context to refer to the world of symbols that are used in and give meaning to rituals.<sup>48</sup> Victory songs, though not rituals, are loaded with phrases and imagery that are symbolic and are to be understood through the lens of warfare. After all, victory songs were an "essential part in concluding the complex series of events that was victorious warfare."<sup>49</sup> In order to properly understand victory songs, they must be placed in the proper context of the Ancient Near Eastern view of warfare. Unlike the modern world, where war is generally a secular affair, entirely devoid of God, the Ancient Near East had a pervasive theology of war.

The Sumerian city-states were each associated with a particular deity who ruled from the central ziggurat temple of the city. It was thought that Enlil, at the dawn of time, decided the boundaries between the gods (the city-states they represented). These boundary markers were sacred and inviolable; crossing them was a reason to go to war.<sup>50</sup> This theological justification (waging war on a

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence M. Wills, *Judith: A Commentary on the Book of Judith, Hermeneia*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 375-376.

<sup>44</sup> Joel B. Green, *Luke, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordan D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 168.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>46</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 683.

<sup>47</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Frank H. Gorman Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in Priestly Theology* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>49</sup> Meyers, "Of Drums and Damsels," 25.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

particular land because it was granted to the attackers by the gods) would later be used by the Babylonian Empire to justify their own expansions.<sup>51</sup> In one inscription, Nebuchadnezzar states that “Marduk gave me the widespread peoples for shepherding, he sublimely commanded me to care for cult centers (and) to renew temples.”<sup>52</sup> Marduk gave the whole world into the hands of the king so that he could do what kings were created to do: maintain and build temples for the light of the gods to shine farther and wider across the world.<sup>53</sup> This gave Nebuchadnezzar the necessary theological justification for world conquest, which enabled him to build more temples, and it also provided more materials and men for the building of temples (such as the ziggurat of Marduk) within the realm of Babylon proper.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, Assyria engaged in what Liverani calls “the imperial mission,” the divine decree that Assyria should conquer the whole world.<sup>55</sup> For Assyria, this was not just about conquest alone but about the expansion of creation. The city of Asshur was both the god himself and the center of the empire<sup>56</sup> and a perfectly ordered creation. The farther from the perfectly ordered center one went, the wilder and more chaotic the world became.<sup>57</sup> The kings of Assyria participated in creation in two ways: through the creation and use of improved technologies to get more yield from the earth and by militarily extending into the chaos of the peripheral regions beyond the empire and subduing them (bringing order into what was chaos).<sup>58</sup> As the empire expanded, the good of an ordered civilization filled up more of the earth and the chaotic outlands shrunk with every conquered city. The act of victorious war was celebrated with song as musicians accompanied the army into battle<sup>59</sup> and sang songs in the immediate aftermath of the battle.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Jerrold S. Cooper, *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagaš-Umma Border Conflict* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1983), 11.

<sup>52</sup> David Stephen Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>53</sup> G.K. Beale, and D.A. Carson, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004) 100-102.

<sup>54</sup> Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, trans. Andrea Trameri and Jonathan Valk (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Nathan Lovell, “Immanuel in Imperial Context: Isaiah, God, and History,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 2 (2022): 129.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Liverani, *Assyria*, 13-14.

<sup>59</sup> Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 335.

<sup>60</sup> David Nadali, “Outcomes of Battle: Triumphal Celebrations in Assyria,” in *Rituals of Triumph in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Anthony Spalinger, and Jeremy Armstrong (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 79-80.

In Egypt, the Pharaohs began extending their realm after the Second Intermediate Period. After having experienced the dangers of the outside world, they marched to secure the borders of Egypt.<sup>61</sup> These conquests allowed them to take control of the holy land that contained the cedar mountains of Lebanon,<sup>62</sup> whose wood was necessary for the maintenance of an ordered creation through the construction of solar barges, temple doors, sarcophagi, and embalming oils, among other things.<sup>63</sup> The importance of this wood can be seen in such documents as *The Lamentation of a Prophet*, where the lack of cedar is associated with the chaos of the time.<sup>64</sup> As such, a by-product of Egyptian imperialism was right order. But unlike Israelite or Assyrian ideologies, the expansion of Egypt was not about spreading order to the chaotic outer regions but about ensuring the order of Egypt herself, who, in part, relied on the outside forces for that order to be maintained.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike the other cultures, there are surviving Egyptian victory songs. These include the song sung by the queen in the *Tale of Sinuhe*, *The Hymn of Merneptah*, and *The Hymn for the Ascension of Rameses IV*.<sup>66</sup> A major theme of these songs is that, through victory, the good order of creation has been re-established, and chaos has been vanquished.<sup>67</sup> The song does not praise the actual conquest but is mainly about the peace that is brought to the region that is conquered.<sup>68</sup> These conquered people (in the case of Merneptah, the Hurrians) could be portrayed as a widow who will bear Pharaoh's children,<sup>69</sup> furthering the interconnected ideas of conquest and creation.

As shown throughout the Ancient Near East, there was a connection between warfare and creation. While the Egyptian and Assyrian conceptions are more overt, even the Sumerian and Babylonian worldviews have creative associations, as the temple was seen as the embodiment of the cosmic mountain. *The Gudea Cylinders* depict the building of the temple as if it were rising out of the abzu, just like the cosmic mountain, from where the god's rule and life are

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<sup>61</sup> Ellen Morris, *Ancient Egyptian Imperialism* (Medford: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 119-120.

<sup>62</sup> Sara A. Rich, *Cedar Forests, Cedar Ships: Allure, Lore, and Metaphor in the Mediterranean Near East* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2017), 53.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>64</sup> Adolf Erman, and Alyward M. Blackman, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Collection of Poems, Narratives, and Manuals of Instruction from the Third and Second Millennia BC* (London: Routledge, 2005), 92-93.

<sup>65</sup> Liverani, *Assyria*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Poethig, "The Women's Victory Song Tradition," 90.

<sup>67</sup> Ingrid Hjem and Thomas L. Thompson, "The Victory Song of Merneptah, Israel, and the People of Palestine," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27, no. 1 (2002): 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

granted.<sup>70</sup> During the Babylonian Akitu festival at the Esagila Temple, there would be a dramatic representation of Marduk's victory over chaos and the creation of mankind.<sup>71</sup> The temple, creation, and right order were established and protected with military victory.

### The Ideology of Holy War in Ancient Israel

For Israel, Yahweh and His dwelling space was the center of the ordered cosmos,<sup>72</sup> and a living death awaited any who lived outside of the camp or land where He dwelt.<sup>73</sup> Israel was allowed to participate in this ordered creation through the Covenant. Likewise, the Canaanites were “agents of chaos” because they were outside of that order (one example are the Gibeonites, who are crafty like the serpent in Eden and trick the Israelites into disobeying God<sup>74</sup>). Any war against these people was a war that aimed at pushing the chaos farther from the ordered center of Israel and was meant to expand the order of creation across the world.<sup>75</sup>

This all has its roots in Genesis 1 as God created the Garden of Eden, which rested on the mountain of God (Ezek. 28:13-14). This cosmic mountain was the center of an ordered creation, and the farther from it one went, the deeper into chaos or non-existence one traveled.<sup>76</sup> If the whole world was perfect at creation, then the garden would lose its sacredness, but rather “the garden in Eden represents a territorial space within creation that is qualitatively better than the rest of creation, a unique blessed place.”<sup>77</sup> After all, God did not get rid of the chaotic waters of pre-creation,<sup>78</sup> as Revelation states He will with the New

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<sup>70</sup> John M. Lunquist, “What is a Temple?: A Preliminary Typology” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H.B. Huffman, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 86.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>72</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Day of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Leviticus* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2015), 30-31.

<sup>73</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 156.

<sup>74</sup> Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 131.

<sup>75</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 157-158.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard F. Batto, “The Reed Sea: Requiescat in Pace,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 1 (March 1983): 33.

<sup>77</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2007), 255.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

Heavens and Earth. It is thus to be assumed that chaos still lingered around Eden. It is this chaotic land that God commands Adam and Eve to subdue (Gen. 1:28).

The Hebrew word *כָּבַד* is forceful, entailing the subjugation of someone or something that resists and opposes.<sup>79</sup> On one hand, the command to subdue the earth is directed at the inhabitants of the very garden (Adam and Eve did not subdue the serpent but were subdued by him).<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, God is commanding them to go someplace that will resist them, the chaotic hinterlands of creation, and subdue it. Thus, they extended the realm of Eden until the presence of God manifested in the garden covered the face of the earth.<sup>81</sup> With the Fall, the actual garden is taken away from humanity. God, however, offered a substitute through the Tabernacle and Temple which become representations of the Garden of Eden, with the holy of holies being where God dwelt in power and majesty like the summit of Eden.<sup>82</sup>

If the Temple/Tabernacle represented the Garden that was in Eden, then the Promised Land as a whole represented Eden.<sup>83</sup> This can be seen as the same stipulation of obedience to God in exchange for the land is given to both Adam and Israel;<sup>84</sup> both are portrayed as fruitful lands (Jer. 2:6-7),<sup>85</sup> and God forces Adam and Israel out of the land once His laws are broken. In fact, the prophetic writers themselves make the connection at several points (Jer. 27:5-6, Isa. 51:3, Ezek. 36:35, Joel 2:3).<sup>86</sup> Even beyond the Old Testament, the association persisted in Second Temple literature (Jubilees 8:19) and Rabbinic writings (Mishnah Kelim 1:6-9). However, this new Eden was to be regained through Adam's original goal: subduing the earth and chaos (it should be noted here that the very name "Canaan" comes from a root that means "to subdue"<sup>87</sup>). Just as Adam was called to subdue the creatures in the garden, Israel was called to subdue the Canaanites, and as Adam was called to subdue the chaotic outlands, so too was Israel meant to expand so that they represented Yahweh before all the nations.<sup>88</sup> God's promise to Abram, Katancho notes, will bless "the whole earth. It seems that the land of Abraham is not going to have fixed borders. It will continue

<sup>79</sup> Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, 220.

<sup>80</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 104.

<sup>81</sup> Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (2005): 10-11.

<sup>82</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 176.

<sup>83</sup> Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2015), 96.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>85</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 99.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>88</sup> Munther, *From Land to Lands*, 97.

to expand as it conquers the gates of the enemies, thus increasing in size both territorially and demographically. The land of Abraham will continue to extend until it is equal to the whole earth.”<sup>89</sup>

Since warfare was about fulfilling God’s original Edenic plans for humanity, warfare became an act of worship.<sup>90</sup> It was initiated by Yahweh (as these wars were His wars and His enemies<sup>91</sup>) either directly to a covenant mediator or when a war leader inquired of the Lord during a particular situation.<sup>92</sup> When Israel mustered for war, they did so with a horn blast (which was used for all sorts of war and cultic duties, such as rallying scattered troops or welcoming the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem<sup>93</sup>) or, a particularly old custom, was to give sacrificial flesh to the tribes.<sup>94</sup> When Israel mustered, they had to be ready for the experience of meeting God as He dwelt with the army. Therefore, Israel prepared themselves as if they were entering the Holy of Holies<sup>95</sup> for “das kriegsager, die Wiege der Nation, war auch das älteste Heiligtum. Da war Israel und de war Jave.”<sup>96</sup> They consecrated themselves, as can be seen in Josh. 5<sup>97</sup> and Judg. 5 (where there are long-haired warriors who took a Nazarite-like vow). The soldiers needed to be consecrated because volunteering to fight with and for Yahweh was to offer themselves “as a freewill offering in a sacrificial sense.”<sup>98</sup> It is for this reason that Uriah refused to lay with his wife when brought back from war because then he would be ritually unclean to fight.<sup>99</sup> Once gathered, the army offered sacrifices<sup>100</sup> and marched to war, sometimes singing praises to God (2 Chron. 20:20-23).<sup>101</sup> Then, right before battle, an oracle would ask if God was with them and, upon an affirmative response, would respond, “The Lord has

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<sup>89</sup> Y. Katanacho, *The Land of Christ*, (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2012), 80.

<sup>90</sup> Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 34.

<sup>91</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 104.

<sup>92</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 33.

<sup>93</sup> Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 72-73.

<sup>94</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. and ed. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 41.

<sup>95</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 35.

<sup>96</sup> “The war camp, the cradle of the nation, was also its oldest sanctuary. There was Israel, and there was Yahweh.” Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag Georg Reimer, 1904), 27.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>98</sup> Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 70.

<sup>99</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 36.

<sup>100</sup> Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 42.

<sup>101</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 39.

given [the enemy nation] into our hands.”<sup>102</sup> The battle would open with a war cry and then be joined. During battle, Yahweh aided the Israelites or fought alone on Israel’s behalf.<sup>103</sup> After the victory was the high point of war, the קָרַם where the spoils were consecrated and given to Yahweh.<sup>104</sup> Here it should be noted that קָרַם probably more literally means “remove from use” rather than “utterly destroy.” What was being removed was not so much individual people as it was their identity as Canaanites,<sup>105</sup> which was common in the Ancient Near East.<sup>106</sup> These Canaanites worshiped false gods and would be a snare to the Israelites if not snuffed out or pushed out so that their national and cultural identity was not adopted by Israel (as what happened).<sup>107</sup> Israel was thus called to go into the land and push aside the chaos out of the good land that God had given them, transforming what was once chaos into order as God’s presence and people settled into the land. For to them, Yahweh was the center of an ordered cosmos, the axis mundi. The land where He dwelt was ordered, and the nations around them were chaos.<sup>108</sup> Thus, holy war was a re-enactment of God’s creation of the earth.

This is further evident in that neither creation nor the conquest/holy wars are the central pillars of their narratives (the creation account of Genesis 1 and Deuteronomistic history, respectively); instead, the focus comes on what happens *after*. For creation, the focus is on the Sabbath, while for Deuteronomistic history, the focus is on putting God’s name in the temple.<sup>109</sup> The same can be true of holy war, where the focus is on קָרַם, the consecration of spoils to Yahweh.<sup>110</sup> If holy war can truly be seen as an act of creation, then the victory song could very well have acted as a type of sabbath, where the men and women came together in the presence of Yahweh (the location of these songs will be discussed later) to praise Him for His continued act of creation and salvation. He pushed the chaos further away from the ordered center of the world and paved the way for the qualitative and/or quantitative growth of the garden-land of Israel.

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<sup>102</sup> Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 42-44.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>105</sup> Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest*, 179.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>110</sup> Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 49.

### The Performers

The women who sang victory songs likely gathered themselves into associations that would have become little communities, meeting regularly to compose and rehearse the songs<sup>111</sup> and to pass the songs of the past from generation to generation.<sup>112</sup> By performing victory songs, women were given the chance to show their indispensability to men and gain recognition and status.<sup>113</sup> These songs were one of the few times women could break out of the domestic sphere and interact in a legitimate and meaningful way in the public world usually dominated by men.<sup>114</sup> During these situations, they might have been rewarded with spoils from the war as if they were themselves soldiers (Judg. 5:30 and 2 Sam. 1:23 both suggest this).<sup>115</sup> This is akin to Israel, the marginalized nation of highland villages who, through victorious battle, stepped out onto the world stage to gain international recognition. These songs were sung out of women's own experiences, such as powerlessness, and relate to the powerlessness and experiences of Israel.<sup>116</sup> In a way, these associations of women mirrored the Israelite community as the army mirrored the community (as once mustered, the army could be called "the People of Yahweh"<sup>117</sup>)

### The Location of the Song

Victory songs are sung in a variety of locations. Mariam sang hers on the opposite side of the Reed Sea while the community just witnessed the power of Yahweh, who crushed pharaoh's army and led Israel to the Promised Land in a pillar of cloud. Deborah sang hers at the watering places,<sup>118</sup> a symbolic location as

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<sup>111</sup> Meyers, "Drums and Damsels," 24.

<sup>112</sup> Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition," 170.

<sup>113</sup> Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses*, 105.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>115</sup> Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition," 141-142.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-239.

<sup>117</sup> Von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 41.

<sup>118</sup> This comes from Judges 5:11, a reference within the Song of Deborah itself. Because of this verse some have taken the view that this song represents a tradition of itinerant singers who went village to village singing the songs of the Israelite people. Such a view is taken up by Geoffrey P. Miller, "The Song of Deborah: A Legal-Economic Analysis," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 144, no. 5 (May 1996): 2310. Thus, the actual singing of the Song of Deborah did not take place there but at a different cultic site, such as suggested by Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches*, Vol. 3. *Josue, Richter, I. u. II. Samuelis* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968), 58. However, given the nature of the singers of Israel, it is more likely that the songs were preserved by associations of women singers, and that verse 11 refers to the acts of celebration that were contemporary with the singing of the song. Deborah knew where she and Israel would celebrate the battle and included it as the



God used water throughout the battle, wielding rain and the Kishon River to crush the invading Canaanites.<sup>119</sup> It is by a place of water (which also served as traditional meeting places<sup>120</sup> and was frequently associated with the divine<sup>121</sup>) that Israel praises Yahweh. Jephthah's daughter sings (or would have sung) her song at Mizpah, one of the three major shrines of pre-monarchy Israel (along with Shiloh and Bethel).<sup>122</sup> It was here that the hosts of Israel gathered in Judg. 20:1 to fight against the Benjamites. Hannah sings her song at the tent-sanctuary of Shiloh. Finally, the women of 1 Sam. 18 come to an undisclosed location to welcome the soldiers "home" (18:6, NIV<sup>123</sup>). However, there is a problem with the translation of "home" as it is not there in the Hebrew text, rather simply stating *בְּבֹאֵם* or "as they were coming." This is a preposition and a Qal infinite construct 3mp of the root word *בָּוֹא*. In this form, the word is used eleven times in the Old Testament, and, for almost every instance, the place that is being entered is sacred space.

Scripture	Referent
Exodus 28:43	Tabernacle
Exodus 30:20	Tabernacle
Exodus 40:32	Tabernacle
1 Samuel 16:6	Undisclosed, but probably a shrine, as Samuel and Jesse offer sacrifices
1 Samuel 18:6	undisclosed
2 Chronicles 20:10	"out" from Egypt
Ezra 2:68	House of the Lord
Ezekiel 42:14	Holy Precincts of the Temple
Ezekiel 44:17	Inner Court of the Temple
Ezekiel 44:21	Inner Court of the Temple
Ezekiel 46:10	Inner Court of the Temple

(Figure 1: Uses of *בְּבֹאֵם*)

prologue to the actual battle account of her song as suggested by Richard D. Nelson, *Judges: A Critical and Rhetorical Commentary* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 108.

<sup>119</sup> Alan J. Hauser, "Two Songs of Victory: A Comparison of Exodus 15 and Judges 5," in *Directions in Biblical Poetry*, ed. Elaine R. Follis (New York: Bloomsbury, 1997), 271-272.

<sup>120</sup> Niditch, *Judges*, 79.

<sup>121</sup> Lunquist, "What is a Temple?," 88-89.; Susan Guettle Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space in the Ancient Greek Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 192.

<sup>122</sup> Donald G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 131.

<sup>123</sup> All scriptures, unless otherwise notes are NIV.

As Figure 1 shows, the word *בְּבוֹאָם* is used almost exclusively of the Temple/Tabernacle structure. The only places that are not explicit in this are 1 Sam. 18:6 and 2 Chron. 20:10 (in which they *בְּבוֹאָם* out of Egypt and go into Canaan, a location which, as has been showed, already carries the weight of sacred space as the center of an ordered cosmos). Thus, the place that the army returns to, that women from across Israel flock to, is more than likely a cultic shrine such as Gibeon (which had replaced Shiloh as hosting the Tabernacle as the permanent stone structures were destroyed by Philistines<sup>124</sup>). As with Mizpah, shrines were often mustering points for armies as Shiloh was the site of the war-camp in the early days (Jos. 18:1; 19:51, Judg. 21:12).<sup>125</sup> 1 Sam. 2:22 even gives the women who waited outside Shiloh the militaristic term the “host of women.”<sup>126</sup> Since Shiloh was meant to be *the* cultic site as the place of the Tabernacle, according to Jos. 22,<sup>127</sup> it is likely that this is where the women gave their victory song. Alternatively, it could have been a different cultic site as the song results in fear and thus further exemplifies the chaos that comes from a fractured cult.<sup>128</sup> Based on the textual evidence, victory songs were sung at cultic sites or places where God’s power had been made known, and His presence dwelt. Here women who represented Israel praised God for his acts of expanding Eden in the very center of the ordered universe, His presence.

### The Instrument

The drum itself had a rather simple construction. It had a wooden frame with a leather membrane stretched across it and fastened by nails, glue, rope, or thongs.<sup>129</sup> The membrane itself was made from horned animals such as goats and rams, according to the Talmud.<sup>130</sup> They possibly also had designs painted on them, as Arabic women’s frame-drums have designs such as the tree of life on the skin.<sup>131</sup> There are two main instances in which the frame-drum is played. Firstly, by women alone (generally accompanying a victory song). Secondly, as part of a

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<sup>124</sup> Akiva Males, “Reconstructing the Destruction of the Tabernacle of Shiloh,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2016): 9-10.

<sup>125</sup> Schley, *Shiloh*, 192.

<sup>126</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 149-152.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>128</sup> Matthews, *The History of Bronze and Iron Age Israel*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses*, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition,” 31.

<sup>131</sup> Veronica Doubleday, “The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power,” *Ethnomusicology* Vol 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 116.

cultic ensemble of instruments (where it can be played by a man), where it is used in association with praise (Ps.150) and prophecy (1 Sam. 10:5-6).<sup>132</sup>

Though not stated in the Biblical texts, there does appear to have been a particular way in which the drum was meant to be handled and played. Based on evidence from modern frame drum playing, Poethig surmises that it was held by the palm and thumb of the left hand and struck with the right hand and possibly the left middle finger. Based on the Iron Age II terracotta figures, it appears that while being played, it was probably held at a right angle. While being held, but not played, it was held flat against the breast with the right hand over the instrument.<sup>133</sup> Another of Poethig's extrapolations is about the scales used by the Israelites and comes from the frame-drum players in Central Asia who use a rising scale (that is, going from the center of the drum, where the low notes are, to the edge of the drum, to hit higher notes) or a falling scale (the opposite). Though, she notes that it is impossible to know if these were used by ancient Israel.<sup>134</sup> However, if this is true, it would fit the idea of order and war. One can imagine the line of women playing with their arms and hands in the same positions presenting an ordered victory song, with other women dancing in circular motions,<sup>135</sup> rather than a chaotic one where everyone moved how they wanted (after all, the singing itself is not spontaneous and haphazard, but is "jubilation expressed in a culturally specific form"<sup>136</sup>). And, if most of the women performed a basic rising pattern of play (even if the professional lead singer performed a more complicated scale<sup>137</sup>), then it is possible that they mimicked with their hands the journey of Israel's armies. When the women moved their fingers from the "axis mundi" of the drum towards the peripheral and back again, they might have been a stand-in for the armies of Israel who moved from the Edenic center of creation to the chaotic outlands to bring order there (especially if Israelite women had something like the tree of life painted on their drums). Of course, there is no solid evidence to support such a theory, but the thought is intriguing nonetheless.

Finally, the frame-drum had high associations with fertility throughout the Ancient Near East. In a story about the drum's origins, it is said that Inanna was going to make the drum from plants but needed rain. To this end, Gilgamesh came to her aid and brought rain. A tree arose from the ground, a symbol of fertility, and from that tree, the frame-drum was made.<sup>138</sup> In Sumer, it played a role in

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<sup>132</sup> Paz, *Drums, Women, and Goddesses*, 82-83.

<sup>133</sup> Poethig, "The Victory Song Tradition," 31.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

fertility rites, such as the sacred marriage,<sup>139</sup> where a priestess representing Inanna/Ishtar would have sexual intercourse with the king to bestow the kingship on him and ensure the prosperity and fertility of the land and its people.<sup>140</sup> This ritual was done at the top of a ziggurat, the cosmic mountain. The same is true of Egypt, where the instrument had links to fertility and rebirth,<sup>141</sup> as well as the renewing of the kingship during the Sed Festival.<sup>142</sup>

While Israelite victory songs are not directed at another deity, there could still be associations with fertility. Fertility simply relates to the idea of being productive, being able to produce new life. For the ancients, this encompassed both women and the land. In Egypt, the frog-headed god Heqhet was the goddess of birth, rain, and flood and was a symbol of resurrection.<sup>143</sup> In Canaan, worship was focused on the gods who could secure the fertility of men, animals, and crops,<sup>144</sup> such as Ba'al.<sup>145</sup> In Arabia, the goddess Atargatis held power over fertility, plenty, renovation, and rebirth.<sup>146</sup> Fertility, therefore, is more about the security of life, creation, and re-creation. In regard to Israel, the idea of fertility is transferred to the idea of creation and re-creation. The prime example of this is found in the Tabernacle and Temple, which are heavily laden with imagery that had led some to believe these to be evidence of a fertility cult rather than representing the Garden of Eden.<sup>147</sup> Edenic and creation symbols are thus similar to the fertility symbols and reflect the hopes of the life humanity was meant to have and will have again through the cult.<sup>148</sup> This can be especially seen in the menorah, which represented the Tree of Life. This was a common image in the Ancient Near East that represented, among other things, fertility<sup>149</sup> and the presence of the deity (such as in Assyria, where one relief showcases the stylized

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<sup>139</sup> Diane Wolkstein, and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 195-196.

<sup>140</sup> Doubleday, "The Frame Drum in the Middle East," 106.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>142</sup> Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 146.

<sup>143</sup> Z. Khamis, "The Symbolism of Mud in Ancient Egypt," *Egyptian Journal for Archaeological and Restoration Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 206.

<sup>144</sup> K. L. Noll "Canaanite Religion," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 1 (Jan 2007): 71-72.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>146</sup> Eyad Almasri, and Mairna Mustafa, "Nabatean Fertility Myth, Place, Time, Rituals, and Actors Based on Archaeological Evidence," *Mediterranean Archeology and Archaeometry* 19, no. 2 (2019): 73.

<sup>147</sup> Richard D. Petty, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel* (New York: Lang Publishers, 1991), 134-138.

<sup>148</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 176.

<sup>149</sup> Michaela Bauks, "Sacred Trees in the Garden of Eden and Their Ancient Near Eastern Precursors," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2012, no. 3: 275.

tree carrying a sun, a symbol of cosmic order<sup>150</sup>). Yet, for Israel, it represented the presence of God (the light of the lamp was symbolic of His glory) and His ability to grant life.<sup>151</sup> In the Temple and Tabernacle, Yahweh can be associated with this “redeemed fertility” that looks at Yahweh as the source of all life, which sustains that life and recreates life to expand the good, ordered creation. The frame-drum could as well have associations with this “redeemed fertility,” celebrating the life that comes from Yahweh as He wins victories and recreates the earth.

The association of victory and recreation has textual evidence throughout the cultic and prophetic literature and their portrayal of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior. When He fights, nature withers (Isa. 24:4-14), but when war is won, nature is recreated (Isa. 35) and participates in the praise of God (A frequent theme of Psalms, with one example being Ps. 98).<sup>152</sup> In these moments the mountains dance (Ps. 114:6), just like the women who sing victory songs, as creation welcomes home the Divine Warrior. Warfare, then, is, at least in a symbolic sense, portrayed as an act of creation. This can be further seen by, again, looking at the location of victory songs, as most of them take place in the cultic site that was seen as God’s dwelling place. Yahweh thus leads the army back home from the act of recreating and settles back into His home. In the same manner, after the original six days of creation, God inhabits the cosmic home that He had just hewn for Himself on that first Sabbath.<sup>153</sup> This idea is particularly noticeable in the Psalms, with their temple context, as Yahweh returns to the Temple after waging holy war.<sup>154</sup>

Just as nature languishes as the Divine Warrior wars, so does music (Isa. 24:8), and music is offered up alongside the recreated nature as Yahweh returns victorious (Isa. 30:32).<sup>155</sup> In the prophets, there is a connection between the offering up of praises after a battle and recreation. Israel’s songs of praise join the songs of creation, giving praise to the One who has made them new, for the act of recreation is not limited to nature alone. Man, as part of creation, can hardly be left unaffected by the recreation of Yahweh’s victory. It is Greenspoon’s thesis that because man is a part of creation (he is made on the same day as animals, formed from the dust of the earth, the state of a wicked man

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<sup>150</sup> Bauks, “Sacred Trees in the Garden of Eden and Their Ancient Near Eastern Precursors,” 279.

<sup>151</sup> Samuel C. Long, “Theological Function as the Key to Israelite Religious Distinctiveness in the Ancient Near East: The Holy Place as a Case Study” PhD Diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 148.

<sup>152</sup> Longman, “Psalm 98,” 271.

<sup>153</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 73.

<sup>154</sup> Longman, “Psalm 98,” 267-268.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

is akin to the state of fallen nature) that he too is recreated with nature when Yahweh returns victorious from war.<sup>156</sup> Isa. 26:19, with its divine warrior imagery, speaks of the resurrection and rising of dead human bodies. The righteous dead will, like the rest of creation, be resurrected with the divine warrior when he returns to his home after a victorious war.<sup>157</sup> All this is to say that there is a Biblical connection between music and recreation, or “redeemed fertility,” and that it is with these associations that the שִׁיר is perhaps played with.

### **Content: The Function of the Victory Songs**

This connection between victory songs and recreation perhaps can be further shown in the actual content of the songs, which break down into two major categories: songs that focus on humans (folk) and songs that focus on Yahweh (prophetic and cult). The folk songs are unique in that tragedy surrounds the playing of such songs. Gen. 4:23-24 is Lamech’s song to his wives Adah and Zillah. The verb used to describe his marriage to them is the same used two chapters later for the songs of God episode and implies that Lamech looked upon their beauty and forcefully seized them.<sup>158</sup> There is also tragedy in that a boy (or younger man) is slain. Lamech celebrates his future of slaying with impunity because of the divine protection that is on him<sup>159</sup> (this has given rise to the song’s classification with the “sword-songs” as it is reminiscent of Arabic sword-songs, which describe vengeance as vital to maintaining honor and depict the deaths of tens of people as retribution for a single death<sup>160</sup>). There is also humiliation on Lamech’s part as he takes on the role of a woman. Not only does he sing a song, which is a feminine role, but he also addresses his wives to “listen to my voice” (4:23), which, in every other occurrence in Genesis, is spoken by wives imploring their husbands to listen.<sup>161</sup> Finally, and most importantly, it shows the build-up of moral decay in society, which results in the Flood.<sup>162</sup> Judg. 11 is tragic, for the song is interrupted, and its singer is sacrificed by her own father. The song of 1

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<sup>156</sup> Leonard J Greenspoon, “The Origins of the Idea of Resurrection,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 262-319.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-286.

<sup>158</sup> Geula Twersky, “Lamech’s Song and the Cain Genealogy: An Examination of Gen 4, 23-24 within its Narrative Context,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 31, no. 2 (2017): 288.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-282.

<sup>161</sup> Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 148-149.

<sup>162</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 375.

Sam. 18 appears three times throughout the book, the other two times being in 21:11 and 29:5. In all three instances, the song creates fear and uncertainty. In 18:7, the song arouses fear, jealousy, and anger in Saul, who, from then on, proceeds to attempt to kill David. In 21:11, the song comes up again among the Philistines while David is living in Gath and creates extreme levels of fear in him that he would be killed as the “butcher of the Philistines.” When he is brought before King Achish, he feigns madness.<sup>163</sup> In 29:5, the song is reiterated by the Philistine commanders who become fearful that Achish’s vassal, David, will betray them mid-battle against the Israelites and so command David to return to his frontier outpost of Ziklag.<sup>164</sup> In all three instances, the song produces fear in great measure, which causes those under the control of fear to do drastic and tragic things, such as attempting to murder and feigning madness. It should be noted that God uses the song in the last instance to deliver David from killing his fellow Israelites.<sup>165</sup>

Bringing all this together, the songs that focus on humans bring tragedy, fear, heartache, and death. It is perhaps for this reason that Biblical text removes mention of the women’s victory song tradition after David despite the strong archaeological evidence to support its existence during Iron Age II. As the monarchy went on, Israel drifted from God, and as they drifted, God ceased fighting for and started fighting against Israel,<sup>166</sup> and the songs reflected that. It is possible that, rather than mention God, they praised human rulers and warriors to greater degrees (an example of this is in 1 Macc. 14:4-15 where Simon is given God-like attributes: bringing peace and joy to Israel, destroying the wicked, supplying the city with food, and providing the opportunity for the land to produce food). Rather than include songs that focused on human warriors or the cult of other gods, the Biblical writers recorded the life-giving songs that praise Yahweh.

The Yahweh-centered songs praise Him for His act of salvation. In Biblical theology, salvation and creation are not unrelated concepts. To be saved was to be made new,<sup>167</sup> and to be created was to be saved and transformed from the state of chaos that one was in into something that was ordered and life-giving.<sup>168</sup> Ex. 15 takes place at the end of the account of Yahweh’s war with the pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. Throughout the whole ordeal, God constantly

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<sup>163</sup> Yap, “The Function of the Women’s Victory Song,” 284-285.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 48.

<sup>167</sup> This is a line of thought that survives even into the New Testament, as Paul declares “therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>168</sup> Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 236.

shows his power through acts of de-creation and recreation: the plagues.<sup>169</sup> Then, as God delivers Israel from Egypt, He created dry land and separated the waters through his *רַחַק* just like the creation account. Yahweh then wields the water as a weapon, not only proving his mastery over the chaotic waters but uses it to destroy Pharaoh (who had a cobra on his crown and is equated to a *תַּנִּינִי*, the sea monster, in Ezek. 29:3). Yahweh has crushed the cosmic sea monster by destroying creation and then recreating the land for Israel.<sup>170</sup> Yahweh's control of the sea are synonymous with his creative purposes as "creation and recreation are acts by which God brings humanity into an ordered cosmos, into life with himself, a pattern which involves his control of the sea."<sup>171</sup> In Judg. 5, the Kishon River is addressed as the primordial river, "evoking the role of sea and river in creation and salvation (Pss 66:6; 74:13-15; Job 26:12)."<sup>172</sup> Hab. 3 (despite being in the prophetic books, is often regarded as one of the oldest parts of the Bible, alongside Exod. 15 and Judg. 5<sup>173</sup>) uses the imagery of God's victory over the sea to talk about the de-creation of the world and its eventual recreation.<sup>174</sup>

These three songs also share the motif of the cosmic mountain. In Exod 15:17, Yahweh leads Israel to the cosmic mountain, while in Jdg. 5:4-5 and Hab. 3:3 He marches from the cosmic mountain in the south to create a new home in Israel. Hannah, though not using sea imagery, uses recreation imagery as she sings of God giving children to the barren and raising to life the dead in 1 Sam. 2:5-6. Recreation is also evident in Jdth. 16, which pictures a recreated Israel, with Samaria and Judah joined together as one, with Jerusalem at its center.<sup>175</sup> The song talks about God's role as creator of all things and subsequent power over all things. Also, the sea will rise up and shake the mountains in 16:14-15 (similar imagery to Hab. 3:6-8). Another instance within the Apocrypha is 1 Macc. 13:51, has the men singing songs as they enter Jerusalem waving palm branches which is symbolic of the Feast of Tabernacles and Eden.<sup>176</sup> The

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<sup>169</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2020), 44.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>172</sup> Nelson, *Judges*, 110.

<sup>173</sup> Theodore Hiebert, *God of my Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 82.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>175</sup> Lawrence M. Wills, *Judith*, 376.

<sup>176</sup> The connection between the two can be seen in the tents are not meant to resemble the tents used in the wilderness wanderings as noted by Jeffery L. Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2020), 17. They probably are rather meant to resemble the tabernacle, the cosmic mountain of Eden. The connections can be furthered by the activities of the festival where people paraded through the temple courts with palm branches and other tree imagery, turning the temple into a living garden, Michael LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context*, (Downer's Grove:



connection is probably most prevalent in Jer. 31, where God commands the women to take up the זָהָר and sing (both are markers of the victory song) in the midst of a creation made new. Jer. 31:12 makes the point the clearest: “They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord...they will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.” Then v. 22 triumphantly declares that, on that day, Israel will return to the presence of the Lord, the center of an ordered cosmos, and God will “...create a new thing on earth” (31:22a). This new creation is the setting for the eschatological victory song of 31:4.

The succeeding narratives of victory songs display life. Exod. 15 is succeeded by accounts of Yahweh providing food and drink for his people (keeping the army alive was part of the military duties of the gods, as is the case when Marduk provides food for the armies of Esarhaddon as he marched from Egypt to Kush<sup>177</sup>). Israel grumbles, but God transforms bitter water into sweet water and then leads them to the oasis of Elim, a little Eden-like oasis in the middle of the desert of Shur with twelve springs (for the twelve tribes) and seventy date palms (for the seventy clans). God provided Israel with honey-sweet food and drink that day.<sup>178</sup> Judg. 5 ends with the land having peace for forty years. At the end of Hannah’s song, Samuel is brought into the presence of the Lord, the ultimate source of life, to minister that life to others. Hab. 3 looks forward to the new creation, and Jer. 31 shows that creation. There is a connection between the victory songs and the life of God.

This idea can importantly be seen in the Gospels, which show him as the Divine Warrior warring against demons.<sup>179</sup> In the Triumphal Entry, he rides into Jerusalem like the Divine Warrior,<sup>180</sup> surrounded by palm branches and singing like Maccabees.<sup>181</sup> When he goes to the cross, nature is in convulsion as the sun goes dark and an earthquake happens.<sup>182</sup> Mat. 27:51-53 notes that, with Jesus’ death, the veil is torn, and the spirit of God rushes out into the world as it goes through de-creation. The rocks split, and the earth shakes. Then it goes through

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Intervarsity Press, 2019), 50. and that water libations were poured from the temple like streams of the river of life as noted by D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, Pillar New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing company, 1991), 321-322.

<sup>177</sup> Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Vol II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 220.

<sup>178</sup> William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation and Commentary, Vol 2, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 592.

<sup>179</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 91.

<sup>180</sup> Paul Brooks Duff, “The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark’s Account of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 56.

<sup>181</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 431-432.

<sup>182</sup> Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, 130.

recreation as the righteous dead rise from their tombs. After three days, Jesus appears on the first day of the week, signifying the start of a new creation.<sup>183</sup> The first people Jesus appears to in his garden-tomb (John 19:41) are women. These women go off and proclaim the good news of the victorious warrior to the community of the disciples, though they did not believe until they saw Jesus. The new creation has come, and the good order of the cosmos expands to all those who put their faith in Him. Now Christians from across the world meet on the first day of the week in sacred spaces to sing songs of the risen king who has slain death, redeemed, and recreated them. Let those songs that are sung be victory songs; let us sing praises to the great Warrior who has conquered all.

### Conclusions

Victory songs were unique moments in Israelite culture. During war, the earth was de-created and then recreated in victory. God defeated the sea, the cosmic forces of chaos, and used them as weapons for His glory. He saved, redeemed, and recreated Israel. That deserved celebration. As the men returned home to the cultic site, the home of God and the center of the cosmos, the women came and ushered in that celebration. They, as representations of Israel, praised Yahweh for his acts of creation in the center of the ordered cosmos with instruments that were associated with recreation, possibly in ways that also mimicked recreation. These celebrations were seen in folk songs, as well as the prophetic and cultic songs. These were moments in time to praise Yahweh for the recreation that had occurred in battle and to look forward to the ultimate recreation. That act was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, who defeated chaos and recreated the world spiritually and will recreate the world physically on the glorious day. Sing to the Lord a new song and celebrate the many wonders of the creative and redeeming God. For when the Divine Warrior is victorious, the only proper response is praise.

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<sup>183</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (April 2010): 283.

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