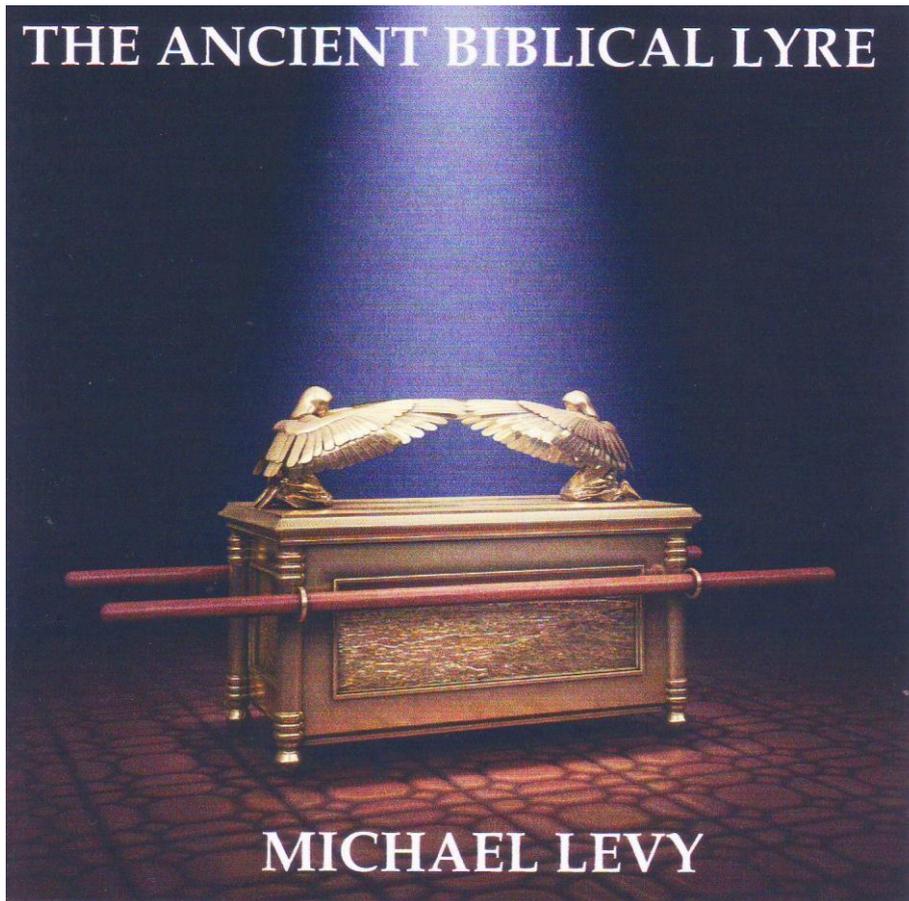


THE ANCIENT BIBLICAL LYRE



This unique album is dedicated to restoring once more, the mystical sound of one of the ancient Biblical Lyres, once played over 2000 years ago by my very own, very ancient Levite ancestors, to accompany the singing of the Levitical Choir...



This particular Biblical Lyre referred to throughout the Biblical Text is the "[Nevel](#)" (in ancient Hebrew: נבל). It is mistranslated in the Old Testament as "harp" – however, there is absolutely no archaeological evidence that harp was used in ancient Israel after the end of the Copper Age, around 3200BCE. The harp as totally replaced by the more portable lyre during the Biblical Era (from about 1900BCE). This transition from the bulky harp to the portable lyre was no doubt brought about by the fact that the ancestors of the ancient Hebrews were nomadic...

My other albums, "[King David's Lyre; Echoes of Ancient Israel](#)" & "[Lyre of the Levites](#)", are dedicated to restoring the sounds of the other type of Lyre which was also played in the Levitical Ensemble in the Temple of Jerusalem - the ancient Biblical "[Kinnor](#)."

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO THE ANCIENT "NEVEL" LYRE

The Biblical "Nevel" is mentioned in 1 Samual 10:5, 2 Samual 6:5, Kings 10:12, Isiah 5:12, 14:11, Amos 5:23, 6:5, Psalm 33:2, 57:9, 71:22, 81:3, 92:4, 108:3, 144:9, Chronicles 13:8, 15:16, 20, 28; 16:5, 25:1, 6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 9:11; 20:28; 29:25, Neh. 12:27.

THE AMBIGUITY OF THE ACTUAL HEBREW MEANING OF "NEVEL"

Unlike the Biblical Kinnor, the exact meaning of the word “Nevel” is ambiguous, as the Hebrew root “nvl” (נבל) can be pronounced in two different ways – either “naval” or “nevel”.

In the Hebrew language, only the consonants are written down - the vowels are added by the speaker...which causes no end of problems once the original pronunciation of an ancient Hebrew word is lost in the mists of time! [John Wheeler](#) explains:

"Nevel is such a difficult instrument to understand precisely because

- 1) leather was used for soundboards both for some harps and for some lyres;*
- 2) the root word itself has several different meanings. The name could just as well refer to a wineskin used for a soundbox, and while we don't have anything that I know of earlier than bar Kokhba illustrating that for the Hebrews, it's certainly possible given how animals' stomachs were used for other instruments"*

THE TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE HEBREW WORD "NVL" (נבל)

- 1) If "NVL" is pronounced “Naval”, in Hebrew this can mean “carcass”, implying that the Biblical Nevel was a lyre with a skin membrane as a soundboard (similar to the ancient Greek “[Lyra](#)” – the lyre with a tortoise shell resonator, over which was stretched a soundboard of taut animal skin).
- 2) The alternative interpretation, if the word is pronounced “Nevel”, means “Skin bottle”. This could mean a lyre with a regular wooden soundboard, but shaped like a skin bottle.

I believe that it is more likely that meaning (1) seems more likely from the available evidence, as discussed below - that the elusive Biblical Nevel may have been a skin-membrane lyre. Indeed, there is a Biblical lyre depicted on coins from the time of the [Simon Bar Kochba Revolt](#) in the 2nd century CE, which seem to show the reverse of a skin membrane lyre, similar to the ancient Greek [Lyra](#) or [Barbitos](#):



The replica lyre upon which I am playing, as made by Mid East Ethnic Instruments is based on this interpretation:



HOW WAS THE NEVEL CONSTRUCTED?

The Nevel was made of the same materials as the Kinnor (the other Biblical Lyre played in the Temple of Jerusalem), namely Almug wood, (Kings 10:5), and was plucked by hand, as opposed to being plucked with a plectrum, as in the case of the Kinnor – we know this from the writings of [Flavius Josephus](#) (Antiquities vii 12.3) and the Biblical text (Amos 6:5). Josephus also describes the Nevel as having 12 strings, whereas the Kinnor had 10 strings.

THE TRACKS ON THIS ALBUM

1) Kol Nidre (Aramaic: כּוֹל נִדְרֵי) - The haunting ancient melody of the Kol Nidre (All Vows) prayer, traditionally sang at Yom Kippur. This haunting song is in the ancient Jewish "Ahava Raba" Mode: EFG#ABCDE. This uniquely Jewish scale may even have its origins in the music of the Levitical Ensemble in the Temple of Jerusalem, as can be heard in [Suzanne Haik-Vantoura's](http://www.ancientlyre.com/historical_details.html) reconstruction of the original melody of the Priestly Blessing. All details can be found in the extensive "Historical Research" section of my website: http://www.ancientlyre.com/historical_details.html

2) Psalm 114 (Ancient Traditional Melody, c. 2nd century CE) - this traditional melody sang to Psalm 114, "When Israel Went Forth From Egypt" is of great antiquity., and was preserved by both Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages, as a Sephardic cantillation (B'tseth Isra'el) & in the Roman Catholic tradition, as a Latin plainchant (In Exitu Israel).

The two chants are identical, both musically and texturally - which could even suggest that there was an ancient common origin, before the Jewish and Christian faiths split into separate entities..maybe even an aural memory of the original melody once sang by the Levitical Choir in the Temple of Jerusalem? A fascinating possibility...

3) Ma'oz Tzur (Hebrew: צור מעוז) - the traditional melody to the Hanukkah song, "Rock of Ages" - The melody for this Hanukkah hymn has been identified by Birnbaum as an adaptation from the old German folk-song "So weiss ich eins, dass mich erfreut, das pluemlein auff preiter heyde," given in Böhme's "Altdeutsches Liederbuch" (No. 635). This rousing melody was widely spread among German Jews as early as 1450.

The traditional English translation is as follows:

*"Rock of Ages let our song
Praise thy saving power;
Thou amidst the raging foes;*

Wast our sheltering tower

*Furious they assailed us,
But Thine arm availed us,
And Thy word broke their sword,
When our own strength failed us.*

*Children of the martyr race
Whether free or fettered
Wake the echoes of the songs
Where ye may be scattered*

*Yours the message cheering
That the time is nearing
Which will see all men free
And tyrants disappearing*

*Kindling new the holy lamps,
Priests approved in suffering.
Purified the nation's shrine,
Brought to God their offering.*

*And His courts surrounding,
Hear in joy abounding,
Happy throngs, singing songs,
With a mighty sounding"*

4) Avinu Malkeinu, (Hebrew: מְלִכְנוּ אָבִינוּ) - This timeless Jewish hymn in the ancient "Ahava Raba" mode, is traditionally sang at between Rosh Hashanah & Yom Yippur. This beautiful melody is in the ancient [Ahava Raba Mode](#).

5) Ma Tovu (Hebrew: טבו מה)- "Oh How Good." The translation of this beautiful Shabbat hymns is as follows:

*"How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!
And I, with Your great loving-kindness, shall enter Your House; I shall prostrate
myself toward Your Holy Temple in the fear of You.
O Lord, I love the dwelling of Your house and the place of the residence of Your
glory.
Come, let us prostrate ourselves and bow; let us kneel before the Lord, our
Maker.
But, as for me, may my prayer to You, O Lord, be in an acceptable time. O God,
with Your abundant kindness, answer me with the truth of Your salvation"*

6) V'Shamru ("And They Shall Keep the Sabbath.") - This beautiful Sabbath hymn is taken directly from Exodus 31:16. Here is the translation of this traditional Shabbat Hymn:

*"The children of Israel should keep the Sabbath
Observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as an everlasting
covenant
It is a sign between G-d and the children of Israel for all time
That in six days G-d made the heavens and the earth
And that on the seventh day He was finished and He rested"*

7) Lecha Dodi (Hebrew: דודי לכה)- This Shabbat Hymn means "come my beloved," and is a request of a mysterious "beloved" that could mean either

God or one's friend(s) to join together in welcoming Shabbat that is referred to as the "bride". During the singing of the last verse, the entire congregation rises and turns to the open door, to greet "Queen Shabbat" as she arrives.

8) Adon Olam (Hebrew: אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם;)- "Master of the Universe". This ancient Shabbat Hymn was alleged to be composed in the 11th century by Solomon ibn Gabirol. The word "Adon," meaning master, was first spoken by Abraham in the Bible, referring to God. The timeless text affirms God's greatness, omnipotence and all-empowering existence:

*"The Lord of the Universe who reigned
before anything was created.
When all was made by his will
He was acknowledged as King.*

*And when all shall end
He still all alone shall reign.
He was, He is,
and He shall be in glory.*

*And He is one, and there's no other,
to compare or join Him.
Without beginning, without end
and to Him belongs dominion and power.*

*And He is my G-d, my living G-d.
to Him I flee in time of grief,
and He is my miracle and my refuge,*

who answers the day I shall call.

*To Him I commit my spirit,
in the time of sleep and awakening,
even if my spirit leaves,
G-d is with me, I shall not fear"*

9) Hava Nagila (Hebrew: הגילה הבה) - "Let Us Rejoice".

10) Ashir Shirim - This ancient Babylonian Jewish wedding song, "I Will Sing Songs To God," was preserved almost a century ago by the musicologist A.Z.

Idelsohn:

"Ashir shirim laél beviath hag-goél. Ayuma temima bathe ne'ima — Hish geal na geal. Eliyahu yavo yighal, yighal."

The translation of the song is:

"I will sing songs to God at the coming of the redeemer. This terrified, innocent, & fair daughter - hurry to redeem her now. Elijah will come & she will be redeemed"

The song is in the timeless ["Ahava Raba"](#) Mode. The traditional music of the Babylonian Jews is unique, as it may well be the "Invisible Baggage" of the Jews who were sent into exile there, after the destruction of the First Temple of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadrezzar II, in 586BC! These melodies therefore, may be representative of the very earliest aural memory of Jewish music...from the almost Legendary Era of the Ark of the Covenant, & King Solomon's Temple!

In this song, the bride is depicted as a metaphor for Israel - just as the bridegroom "redeems" the bride by fulfilling his promise to her, so will God redeem Israel when the prophet Elijah returns to announce the coming of the Messiah.

11) King David Danced - an exhilarating improvisation on the ancient ["Ahava Raba"](#) scale, in my attempt to evoke the Biblical account of how King David danced before the Ark of the Covenant..

May the reconstructed sounds of this ancient Biblical Lyre bring you everlasting peace...

Shalom!

Michael Levy

שלום
שלום
peace