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# SINGING IN THE CORPORATE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Rev. Dr. R. Dean Anderson

## Preface

*This paper is intended as a contribution to the debate within Presbyterian and Reformed circles as to the proper content of singing in public worship. Although some of the material in the notes will be inaccessible to the non-specialist, an attempt has been made to present the paper in such a way that it may be accessible to a wide readership. My thanks are extended to Rev. G. I. Williamson who long ago set me thinking on this subject. May our Lord be the one who is served by further study and reflection upon His revelation to us, particularly as that concerns our service of gratitude to Him. Soli Deo gloria.*

December, 1996

## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations generally refer to works listed in the bibliography. For ease of reference the following list is provided:

**BDAG** W. Bauer / W. F. Arndt / F. W. Gingrich / F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University Press, 2000)

**COT** *Commentaar op het Oude Testament*

**Even-Shoshan** A. Even-Shoshan (ed.), *A New Concordance of the Bible: Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible: Hebrew and Aramaic roots, Words, Proper Names Phrases and Synonyms* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, Sivan Press, 1989).

**Heid.Cat.** The Heidelberg Catechism

**HAL** L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner (ed.), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, transl. and ed. M.E.J. Richardson, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000).

**KV** *Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift*

**NASB** *New American Standard Bible*

**TWOT** R. L. Harris (ed.); G. L. Archer Jr. and B. K. Waltke (Assoc eds), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

**WCF** *Westminster Confession of Faith*

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# 1. Principles of Worship / Definitions

## 1.1 Regulative Principle

The term “regulative principle” has caused much debate in connection with worship in many Reformed and Presbyterian circles. The principle itself is quite plain, namely, that God has in the Scriptures indicated the way in which He desires to be publicly worshipped, and we should stick to that, not adding our own inventions (cf. WCF 21:1; Heid.Cat. Q./A. 96; Belgic Conf. 32).<sup>1</sup>

We find the command to gather together every sabbath day for public worship already all the way back in Lev 23:3. Every sabbath God’s people are to stop work completely and to gather together in holy convocation.<sup>2</sup> God spelled out in quite some detail what His worship was to entail, both in the time of the tabernacle (Exod 25-31), and later in the time of the temple (1 Chr 23-28; cf. esp. 1 Chr 28:19).<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that whilst the shadows of Old Testament worship have ceased, yet regulations concerning worship still apply in the New Testament (cf. Heb 9:1—the point here is that when the writer to the Hebrews says “even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship,” it implies that also the new covenant has such regulations).<sup>4</sup>

Of course it could quite rightly be said that, in a certain sense, everything we do is to the honour and glory of God and therefore worship. But we are here dealing with the regular public worship that God Himself has instituted and specifically regulated (to a certain extent). Thus, for example, it may be one thing to dance or to hold a religious play to the honour of God outside of the public worship service, but neither of these activities would be appropriate within such a service. Why? They are not elements of worship that God has commanded to be there. The point is that in such public worship we follow His guidelines given in His Word, not our own ideas about what might be good (cf. Col 2:23). In Hebr 12:28 we read of worshipping God in a way “acceptable” to Him. The context here is clearly the public worship of the church which gathers together in a festal gathering (v.22 uses the word *πανήγυρις*) and is, spiritually speaking, at that moment of worship in the presence of the heavenly Jerusalem where Jesus mediates in the heavenly temple as the high priest of His church. The word “acceptable” (which may also be translated “well-pleasing”) in v.28 is used with respect to the fact that *God* ought to find this worship “well-pleasing” and implies that He must define what this is by His Word.

<sup>1</sup> A good article on the problematics of the regulative principle appeared after these chapters were written, but in many respects confirms my own thinking on the matter, see J. Frame, 1992, “Questions.” I might just add that I do not agree with his suggestion with respect to drama (366). The New Testament presentation of preaching does not reflect such an activity, and furthermore the Old Testament prophets only appear to have used drama when specifically commanded by God. This should provoke pause for reflection before we too hastily introduce drama into worship.

<sup>2</sup> A distinction is made in the Old Testament between “plain” sabbaths, and the so-called “high sabbath” (NASB “sabbath of complete rest”)—lit. sabbath of sabbaths. The weekly day of rest and the day of atonement are both considered “high sabbaths” and more strictly observed than the other sabbath days appointed for the feasts. John 19:31, for example, mentions the fact that the bodies of those crucified had to be taken down before the beginning of the “high sabbath” (lit. “great sabbath”), i.e., the Saturday. Jesus was crucified on a Friday which was also a minor (or “low”) sabbath day since it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened bread (the seven-day passover feast). John refers to this conjunction of events in 19:14 where he speaks of “the day of preparation of the Passover,” i.e., the first day of the Passover feast which was simultaneously the “day of preparation” for the high sabbath (Friday was generally known as “the day of preparation”).

<sup>3</sup> It is true, as J. Frame (1992, “Questions,” 365) notes, that we are told nothing about the worship in the local convocations in the time of Moses. But (contra Frame) this does not necessarily mean that such worship was not regulated by God. What we have in the Pentateuch is only a selection of revelation God gave to His people at that period of history. That God gave many laws and commandments to His people, even in patriarchal times, which are no longer preserved for us is clear from a text such as Gen 26:5. Furthermore, many of the regulations for worship provided in the time of David clearly date back to the time of Moses, see § 2.1 below.

<sup>4</sup> Emphatic *καί*.

The problem begins when we attempt to apply this principle to specific elements of worship. Here we need to be very careful. Quite plainly God has not regulated absolutely everything to do with worship, and yet He has set in His Word specific guidelines. There is even a problem with the definition of “elements of worship” themselves. What constitutes an element of worship? For example, are prayers and songs just variations of one distinct element of worship (e.g., direct address to God)? This deserves further consideration.

## 1.2 The Relation between Song and Prayer

We therefore turn to the relation between song and prayer. This is something that has brought much confusion to the debate, and so we need to be careful in our definition of terms. What are the Scriptures talking about when they refer to praying, or to singing? There is obviously some overlap in the terms used to define these activities. This is because the word “singing” has to do with the manner in which a text is handled, whereas the word “praying” has to do with the address of a text (i.e., it is a direct address of a lesser to a greater, usually to a god).<sup>5</sup> Other words refer to the content of a text, e.g., praise, thanksgiving, confession, history, etc.

Thus we could have a “song” which is also a “prayer” and is also “praise” (i.e., a piece that is in *content* praise, in *address* directed to God and so a “prayer,” and in *manner* sung). We could also have a “song” that is neither “prayer” nor “praise.” We could have a “prayer” that is “praise” but not a “song,” and we could have a “prayer” that is neither “praise” nor a “song.” The possibilities are manifold!

We need to be careful, then, not to consider “singing” and “praying” as opposites, or mutually exclusive activities. “Praying” is distinct from “speaking-about-God” (i.e., in the third person). “Singing” is obviously distinct in some way from “speaking.” We could go further, for “singing” is more specific than just denoting “the manner of handling a text,” as it refers to a particular aspect of the manner of handling a text, i.e., the presence of deliberate varied pitch intonation in a recognizably structured manner.<sup>6</sup> Questions of definition here belong to a certain extent to the realm of philosophy and aren’t always easy since theoretical border lines can be grey, yet the distinction between the two in general (and mostly in practice) is clear.<sup>7</sup>

Words for prayer in Scripture sometimes refer to a prayer that is freely composed and thus refers to contemporary and immediate events, e.g., Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kgs 8:22-54. It is unlikely that such prayer was sung!<sup>8</sup> Other prayers were obviously composed beforehand (and by nature, therefore, were expressed in more general terms) and distributed for singing, e.g., Ps 90. Both types of praying are Scriptural, and both should find a place in our worship services.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> J. Frame (1992, “Questions,” 360) comes up with a similar distinction defining song as a mode of doing other things. Frame uses this to argue that song is not an element of worship, but rather a circumstance. The argument in this essay is, however, to the effect that singing as a mode is nevertheless separately regulated by God (in the Old Testament), and therefore becomes a distinct element of worship.

<sup>6</sup> This definition is given for clarity’s sake. A precise scholarly definition is beyond the bounds of the present discussion.

<sup>7</sup> The reason I state that “singing” refers to a particular aspect of the manner of handling a text, is that there are other aspects of the manner of handling a text that themselves cross the barriers between speaking and singing. For example, one can “shout” while he sings, and also while he speaks (note that some verbs denote more than one characteristic, e.g., “preaching” which denotes something about address as well as manner, and even perhaps content).

<sup>8</sup> It may of course have been intoned, but certainly not by more than one person, who was, so to speak, freely delivering it.

<sup>9</sup> We could conceivably have a worship service without freely spoken prayer, but this would seriously risk contravening the command to pray for one another’s needs specifically, cf. Jas 5:16.

Thus it is evident that although there can be some overlap in definition, there is still a difference in Scripture between words for “praying,” and words for “singing.” The terms are not interchangeable.<sup>10</sup>

The Scriptures themselves never give a systematic definition of “elements of worship,” but they do command certain activities (such as praying and singing), which though in definition may overlap, nevertheless are still separate entities.

### ***1.3 The Regulative Principle and Singing***

How then, precisely, should we apply the regulative principle to the question of singing? What has God commanded with respect to singing in His public worship? How precisely has God defined what we are to do in this area? It is not enough simply to say that God nowhere commands hymns, therefore we should sing psalms only. It is a question of how precise the commands concerning singing in Scripture are. To answer this we must investigate singing in worship both in the Old and New Testaments.

### ***1.4 The NT Church in Relation to the OT and Synagogue***

The next question to be briefly addressed is the relation of the worship of the New Testament church to the Old Testament. From the New Testament itself (primarily the book of Acts) we learn that the earliest churches grew out of the Jewish synagogues. After Pentecost the apostles continued to regard the Jewish synagogues throughout the world as true churches of God. For this reason they came and preached to them of the Messiah who had come. The apostle Paul on his journeys always preached in the synagogues first, and only if and when he was finally ousted because of their rejection of Jesus Christ did he turn to the Gentiles. At that moment a secession occurred and the local synagogue was no longer considered to be a true church of God. Believing Jews separated themselves from the unbelieving synagogue to form (under the apostle’s direction) a new church of Christ (see, for example, Acts 18:4-8). This procedure had the effect of providing a nucleus of converted Jews and Gentile God-fearers (i.e., those Gentiles who were members, or at least worshippers, at the synagogues) to every newly established church of Christ (cf. Acts 13:43; 14:1; 17:4, 10-12; 18:7-8, 19-21). Thus each church would have had a nucleus of people who knew the Scriptures and were familiar with weekly worship. Paul evidently expected converts to quickly come to terms with the Old Testament Scriptures, as a passage such as 1 Cor 10:1-13 surely presupposes.

Given that the Old Covenant synagogue formed the basis and starting point for New Covenant worship<sup>11</sup> we may ask where the synagogue came from, and what we know of its worship.

<sup>10</sup> Of course a look at any lexicon will bear this out.

<sup>11</sup> This scenario is confirmed by A. D. Nock’s examination of the terminology of the New Testament (1933, “Vocabulary”). He finds that the terminology used, rather than being typical for Graeco-Roman religion, was distinct and heavily influenced by a Semitic background (e.g., Septuagint). He continues, “Such usages are the product of an enclosed world living its own life, a ghetto culturally and linguistically if not geographically; they belong to a literature written entirely for the initiated ...” (135). A Jewish Christian nucleus would have been essential to help communicate the Gospel and interpret the Scripture to recent pagan converts.

### 1.4.1 The Origin of the Synagogue

Modern scholarship has come up with a variety of theories regarding the origin of the synagogue. It has been dated from the time of the exile, from the time of Ezra, or even later.<sup>12</sup> What enables scholars to come up with such divergent theories is the fact that we have very little information to go on.

What we do have, however, is a common tradition in the first century that dated synagogue worship back to the time of Moses. Josephus says that Moses ordained “that every week men should desert their other occupations and assemble to listen to the Law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it” (*Ag.Ap.* 2:175). Likewise, Philo traces the practice in his own day of meeting in synagogues every sabbath, to the command of Moses to set aside the sabbath for the study of the Scriptures (*Vit.Mos.* 2.215-16; cf. *Op.Mund.* 128).

Important for us is the fact that this explanation of the origin of synagogues is also recorded in the New Testament. When James delivered his speech at the council of Jerusalem, he noted that “Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,” Acts 15:21. This explanation also fits in with what we discussed above concerning the command of Lev 23:3 for every Israelite to assemble every sabbath to worship God (see § 1.1 and cf. 2 Kgs 4:23).

### 1.4.2 The Worship of the Synagogue

We are somewhat better informed about the worship of the synagogue in the first century, although nowhere in any of the sources (Mishnah, Tosefta, Josephus, Philo) is there a proper description of a regular worship service.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See S. Safrai, 1987, “Synagogue,” for an overview. According to I. Elbogen (1931, *Gottesdienst*, 237ff) and H. Danby (1933, *Mishnah*, see the notes to the ensuing Mishnah citations) the origin of the synagogue is to be traced to the tradition of *Maamadoth* (“places of standing”) recorded in the Mishnah: *m.Ta`an.* 4, *m.Bik.* 3:2. The people of Israel were divided into 24 courses (in line with the priests) and representatives were present to watch the offerings in Jerusalem, whilst the others gathered in their local towns. But this would mean a gathering only around one particular town at any given week in which a particular course of priests served. The point was that the people of Israel should be represented at the offerings made daily on their behalf. The local *maamad* held services at the same times as the offerings in the temple. The Mishnah implies that this tradition goes back to the “first prophets,” i.e., David and Solomon (according to Danby). But *m.Ta`an.* 4:1 goes further than this for it states that the four prayer services (with priestly benediction) were held on 1) days of fasting, 2) *Maamadoth*, and 3) the Day of Atonement. This practice, however, whilst it may be ancient, stood alongside that of the regular synagogue service in each town. Synagogues met in each town on each Sabbath. The *Maamadoth* met only in the town of the currently serving course of priests. They cannot therefore explain the origin of the synagogue.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that we do find a partial description of a worship service in Neh. 8:1-12. The description is of the corporate worship on the first day of the month (new moon’s day and therefore an extra sabbath day) in the temple. We find the following elements mentioned (and we should realise that the Bible only gives a summary description here):

- the office bearers ascend the podium
- the book of God’s Word is formally opened in the sight of all
- at this signal the congregation stands
- the leader of the service utters a *berachah* (= formula of praise to God)
- the congregation responds with a communal “amen“
- the congregation bow low to “worship“ God (exactly what this entails is not stated)
- the law of God is read, translated and explained to the people
- the congregation are to go and eat and drink and ensure that also the poor are taken care of



The synagogue service on the sabbath began early, usually just before sunrise. A synagogue official (ἀρχισυνάγωγος) presided over the worship service. The elders sat at the front in a semicircle facing the people. The worship service contained the following elements:

- Blessings of praise to God
- Confession of faith (commonly called *shema*)
- Blessing of God to the people (only if a priest was present)
- Recitation of the 10 commandments
- Scripture readings from the law and the prophets<sup>14</sup>
- Singing of psalms and possibly also other songs

The service could last until around midday.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding singing, there is actually little evidence. This has led some scholars to argue that singing in synagogue worship was a late development. But we ought to be careful here, given the fact that we do not possess any synagogue liturgy before the Amoraic period (which begins in the third century AD).

The Mishnah does not seem to mention any regular psalm singing in the synagogue, but it does mention the singing of the Hallel at certain feasts. Nowhere does the Mishnah deliberately set out to describe a synagogue service or liturgy. The closest we get is the tractate *Berakoth* with various regulations concerning the saying of blessings and certain prayers.<sup>16</sup>

According to I. Elbogen (1931, *Gottesdienst*, 502) the Talmud says that after the dissolution of the state of Israel there was to be no singing in the synagogues as a sign of mourning. This statement is at least contradicted by a grave inscription from Rome from the third or fourth century A.D. which describes the deceased as a ψαλμωδός ('psalmist') in the synagogue.<sup>17</sup> This of course seems to imply that there was normally singing involved. Further, we do know that there was singing in the worship of New Testament churches, as 1 Cor 14:26 testifies. Given that the church in Corinth had a Jewish nucleus, including the leader of the local synagogue (Acts 18:8), this singing probably reflected synagogue practice.<sup>18</sup>

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The eating and drinking will have entailed each family going to the priests to receive portions of the meat which had been offered up as peace offerings to the Lord. These meals were the sacrificial meals of the Old Testament and had to be eaten in a holy place by worshippers who were in a ritually clean state. This meal is the equivalent to our celebration of Lord's Supper on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. The concern for the poor here is also the origin of the collection taken at the Lord's Supper table, a practice which goes right back to the beginning of the early church when at Lord's Supper extra food would be deposited for distribution to the poor.

<sup>14</sup> For the reading from the Scripture it was the custom for the head of the synagogue to select males from the congregation to read. Various sources indicate that rabbis, priests and elders were normally given the first opportunity. The reader(s) would stand, and after pronouncing a blessing to God, he would read from the Scripture in Hebrew whilst a translator next to him interpreted this in the common language. After the reading, the reader would have opportunity to sit and expound upon the passage he had just read, cf. Luk. 4:16-22 where Jesus does the reading and exposition. The head of the synagogue could also ask for other volunteers from the congregation to speak a word of exhortation. In Acts 13:15-41 we see Paul responding to such a request by standing and exhorting the congregation concerning the Gospel of Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> See S. Safrai, "The Synagogue," in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai et al. vol. 2. *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987) 922. Philo (*Hypoth.* 7,13) speaks of synagogue services lasting until late in the day (δείλη refers here to the day, not the afternoon) cf. Jos. *Apion* 1,209. Pagan sacrificial rituals also began at dawn and lasted until in the afternoon, see John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. by J. Lloyd (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 80vv.

<sup>16</sup> Philo mentions a group of ascetic Jews in Alexandria who apparently sung psalms as well as hymns they composed, but we ought to be very careful here since it is clear that this small group was in no way part of mainstream Judaism. See below at 3.2.4.

<sup>17</sup> See Schnabel, 833.

<sup>18</sup> See below for comments on the passage in 1 Corinthians 14.

### 1.4.3 The Worship of the New Testament Church

As stated above the early New Testament churches were essentially synagogues that now recognised the Messiah. Their pattern of worship will therefore have conformed in large part to the model of the synagogue. That pattern involved all the basic elements of worship outlined in the Old Testament that do not specifically relate to the temple service, e.g., priestly blessings, blessings to God, prayers, Law, Scripture reading, creed, etc.. These elements will also have found a place in the Christian churches.<sup>19</sup>

But this is not to say that the character of the local church of Christ is identical to that of the Old Covenant synagogue. After Pentecost the significance of the temple for redemptive history was negated. The sacramental worship of the temple (its system of ritual law culminating in the sacrifices) was significantly altered by Christ's completed sacrifice and given to the worship of the *local* congregations in a new form (e.g. Lord's Supper instead of sacrifice, cf. 1 Cor 5:7).<sup>20</sup> In Jewish synagogues sacramental worship was unheard of. Such worship could only take place in the temple. This new situation after Pentecost explains how easily the apostles could apply temple imagery to the local Christian churches. In 1 Cor. 3:16, for example, the church itself is called a "temple of God" in which the Spirit of God dwells (the "you" is plural here referring to the congregation as a whole, not individual members).<sup>21</sup> As noted above (section 1.1), Hebr. 12:22-24 connects the worship service of the local Christian church directly to the heavenly temple service of Jesus Christ as high priest. The Christian believers gathered in worship are spiritually present and engaging in the temple worship of heaven.

The New Testament church also began to pay particular attention to Jesus as the Messiah (i.e., the Christ). This was, after all, what separated them from Jewish synagogues. Thus in the prayers and the blessings, Christ tends to have a central place.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In this respect it is important to remember the basic covenantal unity between the Old and New Testaments, which the Lord Jesus himself confirmed in Matt 5:17-20. It is this basic premise which means that we as Christians have the duty to take the Old Testament seriously and to study and exegete it in connection with the New. The Old Testament, also with respect to worship, is still completely valid today, except where it can be shown from the New Testament (and the principles revealed there) that certain things have changed. Despite the radical changes involved in the destruction of the temple and the abolition of the system of sacrifice (fulfilled in the cross of Christ), our basic principle remains one of continuity. See further my essay *The Old Covenant vs. the New Testament* to be found at:

<http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

<sup>20</sup> See further my paper *The laws for uncleanness in the Pentateuch and NT Baptism* to be found at:

<http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

<sup>21</sup> The presence of sacramental worship also explains why the office bearers of the New Testament church have a more direct role in leading in worship than in the Old Covenant synagogue.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, note the various blessings contained in the New Testament which are identical in form to those found in the Mishnah and other tannaitic Jewish sources, cf. Luke 1:68-75; 2 Cor 1:3-4; Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pet 1:3-5. Compare LXX εὐλόγητος (for *baruch*) mostly of God, cf. Gen 9:26; 14:20; 24:27; Exod 18:10; Ruth 4:14; 1 Kgdms 25:32f; 2 Kgdms 6:21; 18:28; 3 Kgdms 1:48; 5:7 (21); 8:15,56; 2 Chr 2:12 (11); etc.. Jewish life in the first century AD was surrounded with such blessings. Before the daily recitations of the *Shema* (the Jewish creed, = Deut. 6:4-9) morning and evening, blessings were to be said (*m.Ber.* 1:4). The well known eighteen blessings (also known as the *T'fillah*) were also to be said daily (*m.Ber.* 4:3). In fact the pious Jew was taught to bless God in and for everything (*m.Ber.* 9:1-3). Blessings were a very serious part of daily piety (cf. *m.Ber.* 3:3; 4:1; 5:1). We may understand then that for the Christian Jew, Paul, it was especially important to render blessing to God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, for all the mercies of election and salvation contained in the divine Messiah Jesus (Eph 1:3-14). Just as such blessings tended to begin a synagogue service, so also they tend to begin letters in the New Testament. Ultimately the form was modelled on Old Testament blessings, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:56-58; Ps 72:18-19; Ps 41:13 & citations above. This blessing formula of praise to God is to be distinguished from the Aaronic blessing of God upon His people. For a good overview of contemporary Jewish practice, see the tractate *Berakoth* in the Mishnah.



## 2. Old Testament

### 2.1 *Worship in the Time of Moses*

It is really only from the time of Moses onwards that we have any substantial indication in Scripture as to the Lord's requirements for His public worship. In Lev 23:2-3, as we have seen, the Lord required that His people gather together and worship Him every sabbath. To ascertain what kind of musical or singing activity was present in worship at this time we need to turn to the duties of those in charge of public worship.<sup>23</sup>

In Num 3:7 the Levites' task is summarised as "doing the service of the tabernacle." This entailed the requirements for the High Priest, and those for the whole congregation. Nowhere in the Pentateuch do we find a systematic presentation of the Levites' particular duties. Here and there various duties are hinted at (e.g., to do with carrying the parts of the tabernacle, etc.), but we should be careful not to think that this was the whole part of their duty, or even a major part of it. These indications are only given as part of the context of the description of the construction, setting up, and sacrificial ritual of the tabernacle. The laws of Moses compiled for us in the Pentateuch leave us in the dark, so to speak, concerning their ritual duties and their function in worship. Does this mean we can say nothing about music or singing in public worship in the time of Moses? No. For there are at least two other lines of evidence, albeit indirect.

In the first place we have in the Psalter at least one example of a psalm written by Moses (Ps 90).<sup>24</sup> Were there more? Do, perhaps, some of the untitled psalms in our Psalter date from that time? We cannot rule out these possibilities.

In the second place we ought to notice that the regulations concerning temple worship given in the time of David should not be considered to be completely new. In fact the material given in 1 and 2 Chronicles concerning the temple and its ritual is deliberately dovetailed with that given in the Mosaic legislation so that there is little or no overlap between the two. There is therefore no repetition in 1 Chronicles of sacrificial ritual. And we are not infrequently told that the regulations for worship described in connection with the Davidic temple belonged to the laws of Moses. The compilation of laws in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy is not an exhaustive account of the laws which God gave to His people through Moses. Texts such as 2 Chr 30:16; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh 10:32ff make that quite clear. All these texts refer to laws of Moses which are not found in the Pentateuch. For our purposes Ezra 6:18 is important. We read that "they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses." This implies that David's divisions for the priests and Levites actually go back to the laws of Moses. In 1 Chr 23-26 we are given a detailed description of the functions and divisions of the priests and Levites. This is precisely the information we are lacking in the Pentateuch.

We may therefore conclude that singing was also a part of the organised public worship of the sabbath from the time of Moses (and probably earlier).

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<sup>23</sup> Here we need to be careful to distinguish between the official public worship of the sabbath organised by the Lord, and occasions of national or local rejoicing recorded in Scripture, e.g., Exod 15. In the latter cases there is no official service led by the priests, with sacrifices etc.

<sup>24</sup> For *l*<sup>e</sup> denoting authorship, see R. D. Anderson, 1994, "Division," 226-27.

## 2.2 The Temple Service Ordained through David

The planning and establishment of the temple at the end of David's reign provides us with much more information on the Lord's will in His public worship for Israel. Here, as we have noted, we are informed more fully of the duties of the priests and Levites in worship.

The commands setting forth the conventions for singing in public worship are clearly given in 1 Chronicles 25. This was by way of divine revelation, cf. 1 Chr 28:11, 13, 19. 1 Chronicles 25 is part of a larger section of chapters dealing with the divisions of service for the priests and Levites (23-26). Schematically the organisation is as follows:

23:1-5	division of Levites
23:6-23	major family households of Levites
23:28-32	summary of various duties of Levites
24	division of 24 courses of priests
25	division of 24 courses of "praisers"
26	gatekeepers, treasurers, <i>et al.</i>

In chapter 23:1-5 we learn that there were 38,000 Levites of whom 24,000 were to oversee the work of the house of the LORD, 6,000 were officers and judges, 4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were (literally) "praisers ( חלל ) of Yahweh with the instruments I (i.e., David) made for praising." 23:6-23 gives the various major family households of the Levites, 23:28-32 summarises again the various duties of the Levites. Whilst no specific division of duties is given in these verses, verses 30-31 clearly apply to the 4,000 "praisers." Their duty is circumscribed as standing every morning and evening to confess and to praise.<sup>25</sup> Temple singing thus took place every morning and evening in conjunction with the sacrifices of the daily burnt offerings, and also the extra sacrifices on sabbaths, new moons and fixed festivals.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere we learn that such singing also accompanied holy processions (1 Chr 13:8; 15:16ff, 28; Ps 68:24ff), the investiture of a king (in the temple, 2 Chr 23:13), special fast days (2 Chr 20:19), and it appears that the singers could even accompany the army on march into battle (2 Chr 20:20ff).<sup>27</sup>

In 2 Chr 29:27-28 we get a better idea of how this occurred. As soon as the burnt offering began so did the Levitical singing and playing, together with the priests who blew the trumpets (cf. Num 10:10). Meanwhile all the people who were gathered there bowed low.<sup>28</sup> When the burnt offering was finished, the officials also bowed low (v.29). Thereupon the Levites were ordered to continue singing God's praises with the words of David and Asaph (v.30). After this the worshippers were invited to come and bring their own individual burnt offerings and peace offerings (v.31). From 1 Chr 16:36 we may gather that songs of praise of the Levites were frequently answered by a communal "amen" of the people, and even that the people communally sung God's praises.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Confession here probably involves both confession of sin, and confession of the wonders of God. The verb חרה is used of both activities.

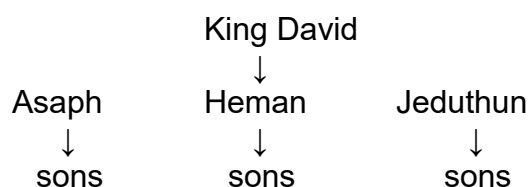
<sup>26</sup> The translation of v.31 in the NASB is inaccurate. The point is not that the Levites were to offer the burnt offerings, but to stand by them, singing as they were offered.

<sup>27</sup> This was probably in accompaniment of the ark which was regularly taken with the army into battle, cf. 2 Sam 11:11; Num 10:33-36; Josh 6; and, in a wrong spirit, 1 Sam 6.

<sup>28</sup> The verb is חנה i.e., did obeisance, translated "worshiped" in the NASB.

<sup>29</sup> Compare here the detailed description in *m. Tamid* 7:3. See further my *Use of the word 'Amen'* to be found at:

Chapter 24 deals with the division of the twenty-four courses of priests, ch. 25 with the division of “praisers” into twenty-four courses, and ch. 26 with the gatekeepers, treasurers and other officials. In 25:1 we are told that David and the leaders of the army (i.e., leaders of Israel, cf. 23:1) set apart for “the service” the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, i.e., representatives from each of the three sons of Levi. Their task is described in 25:6 as “under the direction of their father with the song(s) of the house of Yahweh with cymbals, harps, and lyres for the service of the house of God,” cf. 1 Chr 6:31-48 (in Hebrew 6:16-33) where they are said to be appointed “to the care of the song(s) of the house of Yahweh” (v.31 Heb. v.16), or “ministering with the song” (v.32 Heb. v.17). The three fathers, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun are said to be prophets under the direction of the king. Yet it is clear from the context, both here and elsewhere, that they did not function as court prophets (like Gad and Nathan), but as cultic prophets (i.e. prophets for the temple service). David took an especial interest in the musical activities of the temple service as is also clear from the fact that he had charge of the production of the musical instruments themselves (cf. 1 Chr 23:5). As far as the Levitical singers are concerned we therefore see the following hierarchy:



David’s position as leader of the Levitical singers is reflected in the number of psalms compiled in the psalter from his hand.<sup>30</sup>

In chapter 25:1 we read of these “sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, the prophets (or those prophesying) with lyres, harps, and cymbals.”<sup>31</sup> Does this descriptive phrase refer to the fathers (Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun), or to the sons? Who are the “prophets” here? In the following verses it is clear that the three fathers were prophets directly under king David. Nowhere else are all the sons of the three chief singers collectively called prophets, and so this phrase must be seen as referring to Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun. Nevertheless it is clear that the gift of prophecy was also known among the sons of the prophetic leaders of the Levitical singers. In 2 Chr 20:14-19 the Spirit of the Lord comes upon the Levitical singer Jahaziel who prophesies an oracle for king Jehosaphat (cf. 1 Sam 10:5; 2 Kgs 3:15; Ps

<sup>30</sup> With respect to David’s activity as composer of psalms 2 Sam 23:1 is not infrequently referenced. Literally this verse reads:

*Now these are the last words of David. Oracle of David, son of Jesse, indeed oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the beloved of the songs of Israel.*

The last phrase is nowadays mostly taken in the sense of the “darling of the songs of Israel,” i.e. the person concerning whom the Israelites sing, cf. 1 Sam 18:7; 21:11; 29:5. C. J. Goslinga (COT), along with others, takes the phrase differently and tacitly supplies the noun “singer” after the adjective, thus rendering “the beloved (singer) of Israel’s songs of praise.” This is a more complex alternative given that an extra word which is not in the text has to be understood. Goslinga supposes that the whole passage (vs. 1-7) is an extract from a songbook no longer extant. He thus hypothesises a psalmic context. The following verse quotes David as saying that he received special revelation from the Lord. This is, however, not a general reference to his status as a prophet, but reference to a specific oracle which is quoted in vs. 3-4. Both the description of David in v.1 and the oracle concern David’s activities as king and ruler of Israel, not his activities in organizing the temple worship. The last phrase of v.1 therefore makes most sense when interpreted naturally, without having to suppose the addition of a noun. It is another epithet describing the high position David received in his life, parallel to the phrases “the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob.” We must conclude that this passage says nothing concerning David’s activities as a singer or composer, nor of the nature of the inspiration for his songs. It speaks of a direct prophecy which was given to David at the end of his life.

<sup>31</sup> There is a so-called Ketiv / Qere problem with the word “prophesying.” The word is written (in consonants) as “the prophets ...,” but pointed (by the much later Massorites who supplied points to indicate the vowels) as if it read “the ones prophesying ....” In either case the point is the same.

49:4). The prophet Habbakuk too was probably a levitical singer, cf. Hab 3 and the tradition in LXX Bel 1 which states that Habbakuk was from the tribe of Levi.

What is the significance of calling these Levites “prophets”? The modern lexica and dictionaries agree that the term *nabi* simply means prophet in the sense of a spokesman of God.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that, unlike the Greek word *prophetes*, the word *nabi* does not ever merely mean “speaker” or “proclaimer” in general (as the Greek term may). Yet we ought not to think that the work of an OT prophet or prophetic singer was by definition restricted to prophesying future events. The role of a *nabi* (prophet) or הוֹדֵי (seer) was also very much one of an inspired teacher of the law of the Lord. (cf. Deut 18:15-22; 2 Kgs 17:13; Isa 8:16f). Ps 78:1ff shows us that the Levitical prophets also taught the people through their songs. In this psalm Asaph summons the people to listen to his instruction as he sings a solo to the gathered worshippers.

The prophetic nature of a number of the temple singers as described in the books of Chronicles has led many scholars to bring these prophetic singers into relation with the distinctly prophetic nature of many of the psalms. This connection has led to several theories on the relation of prophecy and the OT cultus. Since modern scholars do not accept that the Chronicler’s description of prophetic Levitical singers can be historically correct as it stands, their theories represent various attempts to link aspects of the Chronicler’s presentation, which in their view may have some historical basis, with other data gleaned from the OT, linguistic analysis and the surrounding nations.

Especially since the publication of S. Mowinckel’s, *Psalmenstudien III: Kultprophetie und prophetische Psalmen* in 1922, there has been much discussion of the place of prophets in connection with the cultus (i.e. the liturgy of the temple worship).<sup>33</sup> Mowinckel noted the existence of many psalms containing prophecy (direct revelation from Yahweh) and insisted that these prophetic psalms were from the beginning meant for the cultus. These psalms were not recited by a temple priest or singer as Gunkel had argued, but were the work of cult prophets. By cult prophets he meant those who were prophetically gifted and had an official place in the cult. This prophetic gift characterised the *nabiim* (= pl. of *nabi*)—the ecstasies as he called them. He thus thought that there was a natural affinity between psalmody and prophetism. The composers of these psalmic oracles were the cultic *nabiim* (prophets).<sup>34</sup> The Chronicler later turned these cultic prophets into Levitical singers. Mowinckel’s studies have been very influential in OT scholarship. He has been followed, for example, in the work of A. R. Johnson (*The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, 1962; *The Cultic Prophet and Israel’s Psalmody* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979]). A slightly different approach has been taken by Th. Booij (*Godswoorden in de Psalmen: Hun Funktie en Achtergronden* [doctoral dissertation; Rodopi, 1978]). Booij argues that there was never an actual office of the cultic prophet as such, although prophets may from time to time have functioned in connection with the cultus. Instead he regards the OT data as indicating that there must have originally been ecstatic singers connected with both the sanctuary and the court. These singers were not really Levites, but were later turned into Levites by the Chronicler who also emphasised their prophetic activity.

<sup>32</sup> HAL defines *nabi* simply as “prophet” as do BDB. R. D. Culver’s article on *nabi* (TWOT, 2.544-45) mentions several questions of special interest regarding the interpretation of *nabiim* (pl.), but does not mention the possibility of the word meaning anything but “prophet” in the regular sense. Likewise Even-Shoshan defines it as “to prophesy the word of Yahweh” without distinguishing any other uses, so also R. Rendtorff’s article “*Nabi* in the Old Testament,” TDNT, 6.796-812.

<sup>33</sup> Mowinckel’s *Psalmenstudien* were reprinted in 1961 by P. Schippers, Amsterdam. In 1962 an English translation of his book *Offersang og Sangoffer* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1951), with revisions, appeared as *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (2 vols; Oxford; Basil Blackwell).

<sup>34</sup> Compare the use of music with prophets elsewhere in the OT, e.g., 1 Sam 10:5; 2 Kgs 3:15ff. See also R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 384-86. De Vaux shows how scholars have used the data of the Chronicler in developing these views, but then attempts to critique it, primarily on the basis of a critical (liberal) view of the value of the Chronicler’s writing.

Although much in recent research is to be rejected as coming from a liberal view of Scripture and religion, this new emphasis on the prophetic nature of the psalms has caused even many Reformed commentators to ask new questions. Thus, for example, N. H. Ridderbos, speaking of the faith of the psalmists, states:

*It is certainly not fair to characterise the entire contents of the Psalter as the answer of faith to God's revelation; then we would be short changing the "prophetic" element in the psalms. In not a few cases the psalmist speaks not in the name of the congregation, but in the name of God, cf. 2:6ff; 12:6; 20:7; 28:5; 32:8f; 36:2; 49; 50; 60:8-10; 75:3ff; 81:7ff; 82; 85:9; 95:7ff; 110; etc. ... The Old Testament sees a phenomenon that is related to prophecy in the making and performance of songs to the honour of God, especially cultic songs. Thus 1 Chr 25:2f calls the work of the temple singers "prophesying"; see further, e.g., 2 Chr 29:30; 35:15; Exod 15:20 (Num 11:25ff; 1 Sam 10:5f; 19:20ff); Luke 1:67; on the other hand consider the fact that sections more or less related to the psalms repeatedly appear in the books of the prophets, see Isa 12; Hab 3; etc., see also such a text as 2 Kgs 3:15. When we pay attention to such data it becomes clear that the texts we first mentioned, 2:6ff etc., are less isolated than might appear.<sup>35</sup>*

### **2.3 Personal Worship in the Temple**

We have seen that at all the prescribed sacrificial occasions of public worship connected with the temple Levitical singing accompanied the sacrifice of the burnt offering (the main sacrifice in temple ritual which was always present and always the first in any series of sacrifices). The Levitical choirs were also expected to continue their songs of praise after completion of the sacrifice (2 Chr 29:30). It is probable that the worshippers also participated in the singing both with the communal "amen" after Levitical praise and in the singing of God's praises themselves (1 Chr 16:36).

The temple was, however, a place of continual worship to God who had taken up his earthly residence there. Private individuals, families or other groups of believers in Israel were always welcome to come and worship in the temple by presenting their own sacrifices and prayers. In fact, 2 Chr 29:31ff shows that the bringing of personal sacrifices may have been a part of regular public worship. That is to say, after the completion of the stated offerings, the congregation of worshippers was given the opportunity for bringing personal sacrifices. The legislation on sacrifices in Lev. 1-7 concern this kind of personal worship in the temple.

Just as both the Levitical choir and the congregation were involved in singing God's praises during the stated ceremonies connected with the compulsory burnt offerings in Israel's sacrificial calendar, also in personal worship those bringing the sacrifices were themselves engaged in singing during the sacrifice. In Ps. 27:6b we read:

*I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;<sup>36</sup> I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.*

Again in Ps. 26:6-7 we read:

*I shall wash my hands in innocence, that I may go about Thine altar, O LORD, to proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving / confession (todah), and to declare all Thy wonders.*

<sup>35</sup> KV, Psalmen, 1.45-6 (translation mine). See also especially his *Psalmen en Cultus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1950).

<sup>36</sup> "Shouts of joy" may also be rendered "trumpet calls," cf. Num. 10:10. It is possible that the Levitical trumpets accompanying the burnt offering are meant here.



Here we see, what the later traditions also confirm, that private persons engaged in this singing while walking around the altar as the burnt sacrifice was being offered.<sup>37</sup> We may presume that this practice was also followed by Hannah when she came to the temple to pay her vow to the Lord and dedicate her first born son (1 Sam. 1-2). She brought along a bull together with materials for a grain offering and a libation. The bull, therefore, must have been intended as a burnt offering. After it has been slaughtered Hannah comes to the priest to inform him of the reason for the votive offering. At this point the Lord is “worshipped” and Hannah “prays.” The “prayer” of Hannah is in form not actually a prayer since the Lord is not directly addressed, but praised in the third person. The content of the “prayer” is also not specific to Hannah or her situation, but mentions God’s blessings for the barren woman in generalised terms. This “blessing of God” is probably best seen as the psalm text which Hannah sung as she walked around the altar while the burnt offering was set ablaze. This psalm text was probably provided to her by the priest or the Levites out of a stock of songs for different occasions which was kept in the temple. Many worshippers will probably have preferred to use such temple-texts than to come with their own prepared psalm-text.

The structure of other psalms show us that the Levitical choir was not necessarily inactive during personal worship. Ps. 91, for example, can be analysed in terms of three different speakers as follows:

<b>v.1</b>	Levites singing to the person bringing the sacrifice
<b>v.2</b>	The response of the person bringing the sacrifice
<b>vs.3-8</b>	Levites
<b>v.9a</b>	The person bringing the sacrifice <sup>38</sup>
<b>vs.9b-13</b>	Levites
<b>vs.14-16</b>	The voice of the Lord God Himself (possibly sung by the officiating priest, or perhaps by a designated Levitical prophet)

Many psalms exhibit such an antiphonal structure. We may think of the examples of prophetic answer to the psalmist’s prayer cited above by N. H. Ridderbos (§ 2.2).

It is also clear from a psalm such as Ps. 80 that the Levitical prophets (such as Asaph) would be responsible for the production of psalm-prayer texts which would be sung by those bringing the sacrifices. Ps. 80 is a prayer for help written by Asaph for representatives from the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. That the representatives of these tribes would have been expected to sing the text (and not Asaph himself) is clear from the address in vs.2-3 (using the first person plural):

*Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Thy power, and come to save us! O God, restore us, and cause Thy face to shine (upon us), and we will be saved.*

That this psalm-prayer was sung in the temple is clear both from its authorship (the Levitical prophet, Asaph), and from the address to God as the one “who is enthroned between the cherubim,” a clear indication of God enthroned upon the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies.<sup>39</sup>

## **2.4 The Reforms of Hezekiah**

In the years following the division of the kingdom the temple worship, even in Jerusalem, became corrupted. Under unfaithful kings the so-called “Davidic” temple ministry was forced into compromise by

<sup>37</sup> See *m.sukkah* 4:5; *m.tamid* 7:3.

<sup>38</sup> This verse should probably be translated as follows: (sacrificer) “For you, LORD, are my refuge” (Levites) “The Most High is your fortress.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Ps. 99:1; Isa. 37:16.



means of pagan practices coming from the surrounding nations. During this period leading up to the exile, the Scriptures inform us of a few kings of Judea who tried to reform the kingdom, and particularly the worship of the Lord. Of interest to us is the fact that the reform under King Hezekiah is described in quite some detail in 2 Chronicles 29. Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had gone so far as to destroy the temple utensils and to close the doors of the temple (2 Chr 28:24). Upon Ahaz' death Hezekiah reopened the temple and "brought in" again the priests and Levites, who had probably fled during Ahaz' reign. Hezekiah further reinstated the temple service according to the commands which God had given to David through His prophets (2 Chr 29:25-30). Although it is clear from the psalms (see § 2.5) that the Levitical singers retained the gift of prophecy during this period,<sup>40</sup> Hezekiah also made a special effort not to lose sight of the prophetic song material which had been generated by David and Asaph (v.30). Their older psalm-texts were not to be considered outdated, but to remain in use. Hezekiah may well have needed to hunt around and collect samples of these psalm compositions. There is at least evidence that he was concerned to collect and preserve other inspired compositions of earlier servants of the Lord, cf. Prov 25:1.

It should be noted that the book of Chronicles clearly views Hezekiah's reforms as in line with the will of the Lord, cf. 2 Chr 29:2.

## **2.5 The Origin of the Book of Psalms**

In connection with the legislation concerning the Levitical singers we ought also to consider the origin and function of the book of Psalms. When did the Psalter as we know it come into existence? How and why was it produced? The Scriptures do not answer any of these questions explicitly, yet that does not mean that we are not able to say anything concerning this.<sup>41</sup>

We will first examine the division of the Psalter into five separate books. Thereupon we will address the question when the various books of the Psalter came into existence, and finally we make a few remarks concerning the inspiration of the various songs in the Psalter.

As is well known the Masoretic Psalter is divided into five books, an arrangement also attested by the Septuagint. This division into five books is clearly supported by various indications in the Psalter itself. In the first place each book seems to end with an appropriate doxology (cf. Ps 41:14; 72:18-19; 89:53; 106:48). It has often been suggested that Ps 150, or alternatively 146-50, should be seen as the doxology for book 5. These doxologies should probably be considered integral parts of the psalms they are attached to, and not an editorial addition.<sup>42</sup> Their appearance at the ends of the respective books, however, is highly suggestive of deliberate placement.

Another way that these books are distinguished is by the use of the divine name. This can be set out as follows:<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> This gift of prophecy remained with the Levitical singers until the time of Ezra and Nehemia, see § 3.1.

<sup>41</sup> The following section is based primarily on my article, 1994, "Division." For more detailed information and argument this article should be consulted.

<sup>42</sup> This is due both to the way they fit each particular psalm in question, and to the non formal agreement between the doxologies themselves. See C. T. Niemeyer, 1950, *Probleem*, 72-78. Niemeyer goes on to reject the view that the doxologies function to close the individual books. He notes that not one collection in the O.T. closes with a doxology (76). While this may be, it ought to be noted that there is no other collection of songs or psalms in the Old Testament at all! See also G. H. Wilson, 1985, *Editing*, 81-82.

<sup>43</sup> For other arguments supporting the division into five books see, R. D. Anderson, 1994, "Division," 225.

Book 1 clearly prefers the name *Yahweh*, utilising it 273 times (as opposed to *Elohim* 15 times<sup>44</sup>).

Book 2 on the other hand prefers *Elohim* (164 times as opposed to *Yahweh* 30 times).

Book 3 is mixed. The Asaph psalms (73-83) clearly prefer *Elohim*, however the rest of the book prefers *Yahweh*.

Books 4 and 5 both prefer *Yahweh* (book 4 contains no use of *Elohim*, and book 5 only uses it 7 times as compared to 236 times *Yahweh*).

In conclusion then, we may justly infer that the division into five books has not been imposed upon the Psalter, but is inherent to its formation.

But when did these five books or collections originate? There is quite some textual evidence to suggest that books 1-3 were fairly early, and that books 4-5 originated together at a later date.<sup>45</sup>

I have elsewhere shown that the psalms in books 1 and 2 may all be dated to the times of David or Solomon.<sup>46</sup> One very interesting item, however, is the line underneath the doxology to book 2 (Ps 72:20) "the prayers of David, son of Jesse are ended." Possibly *ἑφίλοθ* ("prayers") should be read with the

Septuagint (ὑμνοί) as *ἑφίλοθ* ("songs of praise"). It is striking that this line occurs at the end of a psalm of Solomon! Evidently it is to be taken in a general sense. It may just refer to book 2, but likely refers to both books 1 and 2. Given that Davidic psalms occur in all the remaining books, it suggests that books 1 and 2 were completed at an earlier point in history than books 3-5. There seems to be no reason to date their compilation any later than the beginning of Solomon's reign. This would fit with the general organisational activity around the building and equipping of the temple at that time. However, it is also possible that they were compiled by the men of Hezekiah together with the Asaph psalms of book 3 (Pss 73-83). We know that Hezekiah was engaged in the compilation of the words of earlier inspired men.<sup>47</sup> Asaph himself was a chief among the singers appointed under David (1 Chr 15:16ff; 16:4-7,37; 25:1ff). As such he functioned as a *nabi* ("prophet," cf. 1 Chr 25:1-2) and in that capacity appears to have been an important author of psalms (cf. 2 Chr 29:30).

<sup>44</sup> And of these at least two, both occurring in Psalm 25, are probably later additions. In Psalm 25:2 the vocative "my God" disturbs the acrostic division (i.e. each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Verse 22 falls entirely outside the acrostic division of the psalm, which ends in verse 21.

<sup>45</sup> Both Qumran and Septuagint evidence support the theory that books 1-3 of the Psalter were very early stabilised, and that MSS of books 4 and 5 continued to exhibit fluctuation to a later date, probably indicating that they were put together at some later time. This is also supported by internal evidence in the Psalter itself, see R. D. Anderson, *op.cit.*, 220-22, 237-41.

<sup>46</sup> For the arrangement and dating of books 1-3, see R. D. Anderson, *op.cit.*, 228-37.

<sup>47</sup> On the dating and attribution of these Asaph psalms, see R. D. Anderson, *op.cit.*, 235-37. For Hezekiah's activity see, Prov 25:1; 2 Chr 29:30, and § 2.3 above. Ps 137:3 could well imply the existence in pre-exilic times of such a collection of songs. Here in exile, captors demand that some of the temple musicians sing "from the song(s) of Zion." *Shir* ("song") here appears to be collective with partitive *min*. Could this have been a technical term for a canonical collection?

The first two books of the Psalter supplement each other quite nicely. The first book favors the divine name *Yahweh*, whilst the second favors *Elohim*. Of interest is the fact that there are several instances of textual relation between psalms in book 1 and book 2. Ps 14 of book 1 is textually related to Ps 53 of book 2. Here we see an example of how similar psalm material could be reworked at a different time for a different situation. In accordance with the preference of the respective books, each psalm addresses God with the different names. Further, it has been shown that other textual differences between the two psalms should not be put down to textual corruption, but may well indicate a reworking for a different occasion. Secondly, Ps 70 is clearly related to Ps 40:14-18. Again there is no need to harmonise the slight differences here. A portion of psalm material has been used on a different occasion in a different setting. Finally, it is interesting to note the relation between Ps 31:2-4a and Ps 71:1-3. It is noteworthy that all these cases occur with psalms of Davidic authorship (note that Ps 71 has Davidic ascription from the Septuagint). The only other case of intertextual relation in the Psalter is also Davidic. Ps 108 is related to Ps 57:8-12 and Ps 60:7-14. It is not surprising that a prolific author such as David should rework his materials from time to time. It is significant that no two examples of such reworking of the same textual material can be found in any one book of the Psalter. This argues for the fact that, although books 1 and 2 were probably composed around the same time, they are quite separate collections.

The rest of book 3 exhibits no evidence of containing any earlier collection. Ps 89 clearly shows that a date sometime in the exile or thereafter is demanded for this book as a whole.

The textual history of books 4 and 5 is much more fluid than the earlier psalm collections and there is reason to believe that these two books were compiled together at a later date.<sup>48</sup> Ps 137 provides a *terminus a quo* in the exile, but Ps. 126 probably refers to the return from exile. A post-exilic date of compilation is also confirmed by the distinction between books 1-3 and 4-5 in the manuscript tradition noted above.<sup>49</sup> Possibly these books were compiled during the time of the literary work done by Nehemia, who also appears to have amassed a considerable library.<sup>50</sup> In 2 Macc 2:13 we read:

*The same things were also reported in the writings and annals of Nehemia and how he (Nehemia) founded a library and collected the books of the kings and prophets, the books of David and the royal letters concerning votive offerings.*

The number of Davidic psalms in books 4 and 5 shows that there was still a considerable number of psalms preserved from pre-exilic times.<sup>51</sup>

In summation, we have seen that the division of the Psalter into five books is indeed not only warranted, but gives evidence of an historical development of compilation over the ages since the times of Hezekiah or earlier. This work of compilation into known and well used canonical collections was probably completed only after the exile, perhaps in the time of Nehemia.

The concern of Hezekiah for the Levitical singers to use the words of David and Asaph at his restoration of the temple worship indicates that the compilation of the five books of the Psalter probably have their *raison d'être* in the need for approved and vetted selections of appropriate songs for worship (cf. 2 Chr 29:30; and the implications of Ps 137:3). Whilst many of the included songs were authored by known prophetically gifted men such as David and Asaph, others are either anonymous or their authorship is left deliberately vague, indicating only the circle of people from which they originated, e.g. the sons of Korah. Many of the psalms of David and Asaph show a true prophetic character, either by providing a direct answer to a prayer such as in Ps. 12 or Ps. 91, or containing Messianic prophecy, such as the vision of Ps. 110. Other psalms of David or Asaph, however, may not have been the result of immediate prophecy. It is also not necessary to suppose that all the psalms were originally composed by prophetically inspired authors. As we have seen, although Levitical prophets were very probably to be found among the sons of Korah, the group of Levitical singers going under this name are not all to be characterised as prophets. Many of the songs in the Psalter will originally have been composed for use in the temple services by regular Levitical singers. An ascription of authorship such as “the sons of Korah” points away from prophetic authorship. But this does not mean that the songs we have in the five

<sup>48</sup> For detailed arguments see R. D. Anderson, *op.cit.*, 237-41.

<sup>49</sup> Of interest is that Wilson (*Editing*, 73) notes the work of Avi Hurvitz (*The Identification of Post-exilic Psalms by Means of Linguistic Criteria* [modern Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1966]) whose studies have concluded that “the ten post-exilic Masoretic pss (by his standards) are all in the last third of the Psalter.”

<sup>50</sup> The song of praise in 1 Chronicles 16 has often been used as proof that books 1-4 of the Psalter were already in existence when Chronicles was written, (see for example, P. Skehan, “Qumran and Old Testament Criticism,” in *Qumrân: sa piéte, sa théologie et son milieu* [BETL 46, Louvain: Duculot, University Press, 1978] 167-68, cited in Wilson, *Editing*, 77). It is thus suggested that the Chronicler merely took over portions of Pss 96, 105, and 106. In light of my comments above on duplication in the psalms, such an argument does not hold any weight. The composition in 1 Chronicles 16 could easily be very ancient, even Davidic (recall that all examples of duplication in the Psalter occur in Davidic psalms).

<sup>51</sup> Compare 11QPsa “David’s Compositions” which lists a total of 4,050 songs of David itemised according to genre. These may no longer have existed in the time of the Qumran community (probably formed towards the end of the second century BC) but does show that there was probably once a considerable library of them.

books of the Psalter are not divinely inspired. As with all the books which form the Old Testament canon, we confess their divine authority with the apostle Paul who says in 1 Tim. 3:16:

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

We may trust that the compilation of the songs for the five books of the Psalter occurred under God's direction by His inspired prophets so that no song was included which did not meet with divine approval.

## **2.6 Conclusions with respect to Temple Worship**

Several conclusions may be drawn by way of summary with respect to singing in temple worship:

In the first place we have seen that whilst an important place was given to the Levitical choirs for singing in God's public temple worship, this did not exclude participation by the worshippers themselves. This participation included congregational "amens" to songs of praise, general praise by the congregation, and various forms of antiphonal singing together with the Levites and / or priests. We have also seen that the final portion of a public worship service involved the presentation of personal sacrifices with their respective personal songs of praise, often in antiphonal form.

This singing involved a variety of activities including prayer, praise, confession of sin, and thanksgiving. It could be directed towards God either as prayer (direct address to God) or as praise and thanksgiving in the third person. It could also be directed to the worshippers, as in admonition or encouragement to one's brothers and sisters (e.g. Pss. 95, 96) or even a general call to all peoples (e.g. Pss. 66, 98). It could also be in the form of prophetic answer to prayer (e.g. Ps. 12:1-4 = prayer or worshipper(s), v.5 = prophetic answer, vs. 6-8 = Levitical response to God's prophetic answer).

The prophetic Levitical singers were not only responsible for prophetic responses to certain prayer-requests, but they also provided prophetic instruction to the people by way of solo songs (e.g. Pss. 49, 78). In addition they could, upon request, provide psalm-prayers for worshippers in specific situations (e.g. Ps. 80; the song of Hanna). They were probably also responsible for the production and collection of a large body of psalm-material which could be drawn upon for specific worship situations, a body from which the five books of the Psalter are a representative collection. The peculiar expression, occurring several times, of "the song(s) of the house of Yahweh" (1 Chr 6:31; 25:6; cf. Ps. 137:3) confirm the existence of such a collection. Many worshippers will have preferred to draw upon these songs, although there is no evidence that singing in the temple was restricted to such prophetic psalm-texts. It is nevertheless probable that the psalms used by the Levitical choirs, and those prepared for antiphonal singing between worshippers and Levites were composed by prophetically gifted Levitical singers (cf. 2 Chron 29:30). The songs of Jonah and of Mary show how personal psalms could be influenced by the language of the prophetic temple psalms.

The general format of public temple worship may be summarised as follows (taken primarily from the example of 2 Chron. 29:25-36<sup>52</sup>):

<sup>52</sup> The sin offerings which King Hezekiah had brought prior to the burnt offerings (2 Chron 29:20-24) are a special case here for the cleansing of the congregation after corporate sin in neglecting God's public worship, see Num 15:22f.

*Part one: The Corporate Sacrifices.*

While the congregation bows low the statutory sacrifices are offered up on the altar (the meat of the peace offerings is piled on top of the burnt offerings together with their grain offerings and libations). This is accompanied by the priests playing trumpets and the Levitical choirs singing to the accompaniment of their musical instruments. Upon completion of the sacrifice the king and the officials also bow low.

*Part two: Praise and service of the Word.*

The Levitical choirs sing songs of praise using the prophetic psalm texts. They also supplement this with more obeisance to God. The congregation contributes communal “amens” and probably also communal songs of praise. Within this part of the service the opportunity was probably presented for Levitical prophets to teach the people through solo psalms. It is probably in this part of the liturgy that the service of the Word took place as, for example, described in Neh. 8:4-8. This service of the Word took place prior to the third part of temple worship, namely, the personal sacrifices which resulted in the sacramental meals (cf. Neh. 8:9-12).

*Part three: Personal worship and sacramental meals.*

Personal sacrifices are brought which provide the meat for the sacramental meals of the peace offerings which will be eaten by the offering families in the temple courts. The personal sacrifices are accompanied by the singing of the worshippers as they walk around the altar. In some cases there may be antiphonal singing together with the Levitical choirs, and possibly also the officiating priest. We may probably view these personal sacrifices as taking place in groups of extended families. The heads of the households will have provided the sacrificial animals.

This same threefold division is also found in the worship service described in Exodus 24:1-11 where sacrifices are brought (part one), followed by the reading of the book of the covenant (part two), and closing with a sacrificial meal (part three).

**2.7 The Meaning of the Term “New Song”**

The term “new song” is used seven times in the Old Testament (Pss 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; and Isa 42:10) and twice in the New Testament (Rev 5:9; 14:3). What significance does this term have for the content of singing in public worship?

The term in the psalms occurs in two distinct contexts; i) as an appeal that the LORD enable the psalmist to sing a new song, and ii) as an imperatival shout calling one and all to sing a (this?) new song. On examining these usages more closely we shall see that the term “new song” is used to refer to the replacement of a cry for help (when afflicted by enemies) by the proclamation of the LORD’s victory and consequent praise.

When we turn to Ps 40 we immediately encounter a problem of interpretation, namely, how this psalm should be divided. It is clear that there are two principle divisions. The psalm begins with thankfulness to God for a certain deliverance.<sup>53</sup> Yet at a particular point the psalmist moves over to a new difficulty in which he needs a further deliverance from the Lord (vs.12ff). Where precisely should this division be made? The latest possibility would be at v.12 (as, e.g., J. Ridderbos), but it should probably be earlier.

<sup>53</sup> Probably caused by enemies, cf. v.4 & N. H. Ridderbos, n.d., *Psalmen*, 433, J. Ridderbos, 1955, *Psalmen*, 1.349.



At least v.9 seems quite clearly to be referring to the foregoing proclamation of the Lord's deliverance and goodness. This then forms the basis of the new cry for help (cf. v.11).<sup>54</sup>

In any event the precise division of the psalm is of no relevance to the meaning of the term "new song" here. The term appears in v.3 as part of a series of parallelisms in the first three verses. They appear as follows:

he inclined to me / heard my cry  
 out of the pit of destruction / out of the miry clay  
 set my feet upon a rock / making my footsteps firm  
 a new song in my mouth / a song of praise to our God

Thus "new song" is equivalent to a "song of praise" (*ʾhillah*). That God put a new song in the mouth of the psalmist is a poetic way of saying that he changed the song of lamentation (and thus cry for help) into a song of praise and thankfulness, cf. Ps 30:11.

Ps 33 is a psalm which calls upon the Levitical singers and instrumentalists to sing a new song to the LORD (vs. 1-3). The ensuing verses motivate this call by speaking of the righteousness, power and lovingkindness of the LORD, particularly in granting deliverance from the enemies of Israel (peoples around about v.10). We may posit that this psalm was sung by the king after a military victory. The use of the first person plural in verses 20-22 suggests that at this point Levitical choir sings in acceptance of the summons to praise God with a new victory song. The old song of lament and cry for help is no longer necessary. In this connection it is important to note that vs. 10, 13-14, 20a, and 21b should be translated in the perfect tense (as they are in Hebrew).<sup>55</sup> The psalmist is recording what God at a particular point in time has done and is not in these verses concerned with habitual characteristics of God.

Pss 96 and 98 fall into a group of nine psalms collected together (pss 91-99) of which the last eight (pss 92-99) celebrate the military victories over Israel's enemies, and thus the kingship of Yahweh over the nations.<sup>56</sup> In this context it is therefore not surprising that two of these psalms begin with the acclamation "Sing to the LORD a new song." His deliverance is celebrated. The plaintive entreaties have been answered. Therefore a new (kind of) song is called for, namely, a victory psalm of praise.

Again the context of Ps 149 is the praise of Yahweh for military (cf. v.6ff) deliverance from affliction (v.4b) caused by the nations (v.7ff). Thus again His kingship is celebrated (v.2b) and a new (kind of) song is sung.

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<sup>54</sup> Many commentators (e.g., N. H. Ridderbos, NASB) hold that the second division begins already at v.6. This is because they see vs. 1-3 as the original thanksgiving for a past deliverance, and then vs. 4-5 as the "new song" mentioned in v.3. At v.6 the sphere seems to change. It is more personal, unrelated to the song of thankfulness. But it is also direct address to God, and therefore not a resumption of the third person reference to God of vs. 1-3. Therefore it is considered that the second part begins here.

It seems unlikely to me that vs. 4-5 form the content of the new song. There is also the problem that the addressee in v.4 is different to that in v.5. Furthermore, there is no indication in the text that such a song is to follow (contrast Ps 78:1-4). Possibly the whole first section of the psalm could be seen as the new song (J. Ridderbos, 1955, *Psalmen*, 1.351), but the term is not necessarily referring to a particular song anyway (see below).

There is, however, another possibility. A division can also be made on the basis of addressee. Then vs. 1-4 would form the first unit (third person reference to God). The content of the "new song" would not be indicated. In v.5 a prayer begins (here God is addressed directly). It is still basically a prayer of thankfulness connected to the deliverance of vs. 1-4. In v.9 a new section clearly begins where David reminds the Lord that he has indeed proclaimed God's righteousness (i.e., deliverance) to the people of God (the great congregation) as witnessed in the preceding verses—note the plurals in v.3 ("our God," "many"), v.5 ("toward us").

<sup>55</sup> The NASB (as more frequently in the psalms) is incorrect here.

<sup>56</sup> See R. D. Anderson, 1994, "Division," 27-29.



The same is true of Ps 144. Here the Psalmist is in need of the Lord's help to win a battle (cf. v.1) against his enemies (vs. 7-8, 11). He asks the Lord to rescue him and implores the Lord that he might be able to sing a new song to Him (note the cohortative form, lit. "oh let me sing"). The implication is that if the Lord does indeed grant salvation (v.10) then David will be able to sing a new song, i.e., a song of praise instead of a cry for help.

Isa 42:10-13 has many points of contact with the group of psalms 92-99 and should probably be considered another example of the same genre. It again celebrates Yahweh's victory over Israel's enemies, and is thus in form a new song (i.e., a song of praise for deliverance).<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting to note that the book of Revelation uses the term "new song" in precisely the same way as the Old Testament. In Rev 5 there is first weeping because no one is found worthy to open the book and to break its seals. But then the Lamb appears who has overcome and is thus worthy to break the seals. This is the reason for the new song of vs. 9-10. Again, the point of the term "new song" is to indicate a change in mood: no longer weeping, but celebration that the Lamb is indeed worthy.

In Rev 14 the 144,000 are pictured in heaven (lit. on Mt Zion, note also that they are standing before the four living creatures and the elders who are placed in the throne room of heaven, chaps 4-5) singing a new song. The 144,000 were those sealed on their foreheads by an angel (7:2ff) as followers of the Lamb to be purchased by Him (14:4-5). They are the martyrs. Already in 6:9-11 we read of the cry for vengeance of some of them who are told to wait until their number is complete. Thus when they finally all stand in the throne room of God in chapter 14, they are enabled to sing a new song (i.e., a new kind of song), a song which nobody but they are able to learn. They have the victory through the Lamb. Judgment and vengeance upon the worshippers of the beast is to follow (14:6-11). Their plea for vengeance has been changed into a song of victory.<sup>58</sup>

As far as the biblical usage of the term "new song" is concerned, there are therefore no direct implications for the question of (prophetic) psalmody. The presence of the term indicates the singing of a new kind of song in a particular context. It does not in and of itself designate a new literary production as such.

### 3. Between the Testaments

#### 3.1 Post-exilic Synagogue and Temple

Before turning to the New Testament, we ought first to investigate what we know of the situation concerning singing in corporate worship during the inter-testamental period. Unfortunately our evidence is quite scanty at this point. We do know that the Levitical singers continued functioning in the temple right up to the time of the Jewish war in AD 66.<sup>59</sup> However, it is also clear that the gift of prophecy among the singers ceased after the time of Ezra and Nehemia.<sup>60</sup> The Jews generally recognised, at least from

<sup>57</sup> I do not discuss here the purpose of Isaiah's placement of an otherwise unknown psalm within his prophecies at this point, cf. my discussion of the origin of the Psalter.

<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that a large portion of the text witness here reads "as if a new song."

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Sir 50:1-24, a eulogy of the high priest Simon II whom we know held office in 198 BC. Here a temple service is described and mention is made of the use of the singers (v.18). Josephus narrates that in c. AD 64 the Levitical singers requested to be allowed to learn the songs by heart, apparently a novelty (*Ant.* 20.216-18).

<sup>60</sup> We have suggested above that the compilation of the last two books of the Psalter probably took place during the time of Nehemia. Although the latest datable Psalms are clearly exilic, some of the Psalms from these last two books may be post-exilic.

the second century BC, that prophecy had ceased (cf. 1 Macc 4:46; 9:27; 14:41), and our sources no longer speak of “prophets” among the Levitical singers. This probably also explains the fact that no new psalms were composed to celebrate the rededication of the temple in 164 BC, despite the fact that Hanukkah became an important annual celebration.

Rabbinical sources do report some details of the Levitical singers’ duties in this period. We learn that the Levites played harps, lyres, cymbals, and all instruments of music (*m.Middoth* 2.6). They also sang (*m.Tamid* 7:3; *m.ʿArak.* 2:3-6). Apparently children (probably the Levites’ children) sang along with them. In *m.Tamid* 7:4 we find a list of what the Levites sang in the Temple. Various psalms were distributed over the different days of the week (Pss 24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93), ending with Ps 92 for the sabbath day (cf. the title of this Psalm in the MT tradition).<sup>61</sup> According to the *baraitot* various psalm portions were also sung by the Levites on the various days of the feast of booths (*b.Sukk.* 55a). Pss 29:1; 50:16; 94:16; 94:8; 81:7; 82:5b are listed.<sup>62</sup> Adolf Büchler argues strongly that what is meant by a citation such as 50:16 is 50:1-16.<sup>63</sup> Similar lists are provided for the New Year’s festival in *baraitot* (*b.Rosh Hasshana* 30b).<sup>64</sup> At the Feast of Tabernacles the Levites sang Pss 120-134 (*m.Sukk.* 5:4). At the arrival of the procession bringing first fruits the Levites were to sing Ps 30 (*m.Bik.* 3:4). Various *baraitot* note several other psalms to be sung on different days.<sup>65</sup> Pss 113-118 were also sung on feast days (see, e.g., *m.Pesach* 5:7; *m.Sukk.* 4:1).<sup>66</sup>

### 3.2 Extra-biblical Song Material

In addition to what we know about psalm singing in temple worship after Old Testament times, there exist several collections of extra-biblical song material dating from the inter-testamental period.

#### 3.2.1 Non-biblical Psalms of David

Amongst the biblical texts found at Qumran is an important psalms scroll (11QPs<sup>a</sup>). This scroll contains 41 biblical psalms, four psalms not known from the Bible but known from other sources (Ps 151 LXX, Sirach 51:13-30, Syriac versions), and three psalms not elsewhere attested. The scroll itself is dated on palaeographical grounds to the first half of the first century AD.<sup>67</sup> Near the end of this scroll is a prose section describing the various psalm compositions of king David. It is immediately preceded by the quotation of 2 Sam 23:1-7. The section reads:

*And David, the son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, and literate, and discerning and perfect in all his ways before God and men. And the Lord gave him a discerning*

<sup>61</sup> Of interest here is the fact that the Mishnah looks forward to “the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting,” cf. Heb 4.

<sup>62</sup> Cited by A. Büchler, “Geschichte,” ZAW 20 (1900) 97-98.

<sup>63</sup> *Op.cit.* 99.

<sup>64</sup> A. Büchler, *op.cit.* 100.

<sup>65</sup> S. Safrai, “Temple,” 886.

<sup>66</sup> Büchler (*op.cit.* 119) seems to argue that it was sung with flute accompaniment in Mishnah because the sacrifices were private, and levitical instruments were only used for public sacrifices. The flute was a peoples’ instrument.

On the singing of these psalms (the Hallel), cf. *m.Sukk.* 3:10; *m.Sotah* 5:4; *m.Pesach* 9:3. The “hymn” singing of Jesus and his disciples at the Passover is generally taken to be a reference to the singing of the Hallel (cf. Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).

<sup>67</sup> J. A. Sanders, 1965, *Psalms Scroll*, 9.

*and enlightened spirit. And he wrote 3,600 psalms; and songs to sing before the altar over the whole-burnt tamid offering every day, for all the days of the year, 364; and for the qorban of the Sabbaths, 52 songs; and for the qorban of the New Moons and for all the Solemn Assemblies and for the Day of Atonement, 30 songs. And all the songs that he spoke were 446, and songs for making music over the stricken, 4. And the total was 4,050. All these he spoke through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High.*<sup>68</sup>

This paragraph, appearing as it does near the end of the scroll, seems to ascribe Davidic authority (if not authorship) to all the psalms in the scroll.<sup>69</sup> In addition, studies have shown that the non biblical psalms in the scroll have a fully biblical character.<sup>70</sup> If we remember that our biblical Psalter is only a sampling, made under inspiration, of what must once have been a rather large supply of temple psalms, then it could be possible to view these extra-biblical psalms found in Qumran as further examples of this collection. It is just possible that the Qumran sect, when it left Jerusalem c.150 BC to form its community, took copies of psalms from a temple depository of liturgical material.

We should note that there are several other psalm compositions known which are related to the Davidic psalms of Qumran.<sup>71</sup> In fact in a letter dated to the ninth century AD we learn that quite a few Hebrew manuscripts were discovered at that time in Jericho, containing among other things more than 200 psalms of David.<sup>72</sup>

### **3.2.2 Psalms of Solomon**

A group of 18 psalm compositions with titles attributing them to Solomon has long been known in Greek and Syriac versions. Scholars are generally agreed that they probably originally existed in a Hebrew version and should be dated to the first century BC (based on historical allusions in the text). Although it used to be popular to state that they were used by a pharisaic group of hasidim (an argument based on the supposed theology they contain), it is more common these days to leave the question of their provenance and use open.<sup>73</sup> They are not held to have been used for liturgical purposes.<sup>74</sup>

For our purposes it is important to note the fact that these psalms, hymns and songs (all three terms are used interchangeably in the Greek titles), although very probably of late date, were attributed to Solomon. This would appear to show that authoritative or prophetic authorship of song material was judged to be helpful for its acceptance. In fact Solomon's name was used to give authority to quite a few writings dating from this period and later. These forgeries do not appear to have ever gained much favour within orthodox Judaism.

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<sup>68</sup> Translation from J. Sanders, 1965, *Psalms Scroll*, 92. Note that the text nowhere claims that all these compositions were still extant in the first century BC.

<sup>69</sup> This should not be overstated however, as several psalms in the scroll indicate another author, e.g., Ps 127 denoting Solomon as author (as in the Bible). Compare my comments above (2.4) on Ps 72:20.

<sup>70</sup> G. H. Wilson, 1985, *Editing*, 71ff.

<sup>71</sup> See D. Flusser, 1984, "Psalms," 559- 560, 568-9; E. Schuller, 1986, *Non-canonical Psalms*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> O. Braun, 1901, "Brief."

<sup>73</sup> For a good short introduction and bibliography see, J. A. Charlesworth, 1981, *Pseudepigrapha*, 195-97.

<sup>74</sup> D. Flusser, 1984, "Psalms," 573.

### 3.2.3 Hymns of Qumran

At Qumran, probably sometime towards the end of the second century BC, a group of dissatisfied Jews formed a separate community. This community seems to have had a more or less continuous existence until the Jewish war of AD 66-70 when it was wiped out. The Qumran community were a group of ascetics who considered the rest of Israel to be unclean, living according to their own rules of holiness and worship and despising the temple worship at Jerusalem. They appear to have initially been led by a vague figure known as the teacher of righteousness. Most scholarship these days is content to identify them with the Essenes, a group described and known by Josephus, Philo, and also the Roman natural historian, Pliny the Elder. It is important to remember that the Qumran community did not at all represent mainline Judaism, but a splinter sect. Therefore its documents and practices can only be of passing interest to us.<sup>75</sup>

Two collections of poetry or songs have turned up at Qumran that appear to have been productions of the Qumran community itself, namely, the Canticles of the Instructor (in fragmentary form) and the collection known as the Thanksgiving Scroll. Both collections contain several pieces of poetry (songs?) written in the first person. Many of the latter are obvious poetic expressions of experiences of a leader(s) of the community. There has been some debate about the function and purpose of these two collections of poems, but most current scholarship tends to view them as works for private meditation, and not liturgical songs.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.2.4 Philo's Therapeutae

In a tract of Philo we read of a sect of ascetic Jews who, among other things, composed their own songs and hymns to sing to God. In order to discern the implications of this phenomenon we need to understand something of the background of Philo and the context of the community he described.

Philo (c.25 BC - c.AD 50) was a thoroughly Hellenised upper class Alexandrian Jew who is well known for his allegorising treatment of Scripture and for his attempts to rhyme popular Greek philosophy with Scriptural doctrine. In his tract *De Vita Contemplativa (On the Contemplative Life)* he describes, or rather praises, a group of Jewish ascetics with whom he was evidently quite familiar. This tract had quite some influence in Christian circles ever since it was misread by Eusebius in the fourth century AD as if it referred to a group of ascetic Christians.

These ascetic Jews were also quite obviously influenced by Greek culture and philosophy. Philo describes them as a group of property owners who gave up their property to relatives and moved to a lonely country retreat somewhere outside of Alexandria where they entered upon a life of hard asceticism. Philo admits that this kind of asceticism can be found throughout the Greek world, but that it abounds in Egypt. He is here thinking of Greek not Jewish ascetism. The "*therapeutae*," as this Jewish group called themselves, joined themselves in a quest to deny the senses in favour of true and pure spirituality. Six days a week they locked themselves in solitary confinement to meditate upon God and interpret the Scriptures, together with their own sectarian writings. This they did in an allegorical manner.<sup>77</sup> In addition Philo adds that "they composed songs and hymns to God" (§ 29 and again in §

<sup>75</sup> Of course the biblical texts and various other documents found at the site of this community have been very important for biblical studies. But we need to distinguish general texts and documents used by the community but which predated them and belong to mainstream Judaism, and those documents which were productions of the sectarian community itself.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. D. Flusser, 1984, "Psalms," 566-67; B. Kittel, 1981 *Hymns*, 1-6.

<sup>77</sup> Allegorical interpretation was quite a common Greek method of interpreting their traditional religious books, e.g., Homer, especially among the Stoa, see R. D. Anderson, 1999, *Rhetorical Theory*, 173-77.

80). Every seventh day they assembled together in worship for an oration. Men and women were divided by a wall. Most of the women were aged virgins. They fasted during daylight every day, except on the seventh holy day. They appear to have celebrated the Jewish feast of Pentecost as their chief feast (thus not Passover), at which time they also gathered together, listened to an oration, sang either old songs or newly composed ones, and danced in worship. They refused to drink alcohol.

The evidence of this small Alexandrian sect has sometimes been used to justify the existence of hymn singing. It should readily be seen that this is a somewhat far-fetched argument. This small thoroughly Hellenised group of Jews were not at all representative of mainstream Judaism, and their practices were more Greek than anything else.<sup>78</sup> We should note that even their name, *therapeutae* is a Greek cultic term for worshippers. It has been found on an inscription for a private cult / association of the Hellenistic Egyptian god Sarapis in Delos.<sup>79</sup> Another sanctuary for *therapeutae* to Sarapis has been found in Magnesia.<sup>80</sup> It is significant that the term seems to have been readily used for small groups of private worshippers of a Hellenistic Egyptian god, and it is not impossible that this shows further Greek influence on the group.

## 4. New Testament

Nothing radical is said if it is stated that the New Testament does not speak directly to the question of singing in public worship. If it did, there would probably be less need for a paper such as this! That does not mean that proponents of either hymn singing or exclusive psalmody have not found indications in the New Testament to support their views. However, before dealing with certain New Testament texts that have often been cited in the debate, it is requisite to deal with the meaning of certain key words.

### 4.1 Meaning of “Psalm,” “Hymn” and “Song”

It is important for us to realise that these three terms do not have the same connotations in Greek as they do in English. In fact in Greek all three terms are used for psalms by many authors during the inter-testamental period and after, not to mention the [Septuagint](#) (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). What I am saying is that the terms “psalm” or “hymn” or “song” are consistently used to denote biblical psalms by Jewish authors from the third century BC and continue to be used that way in the Christian church until at least the fifth century AD.

It is a well known fact that the Septuagint Psalter uses all three terms variously throughout its translation of the psalms.<sup>81</sup> In fact these three terms are the main terms used in the titles of the psalms. Some examples of the kind of psalm titles appearing in the Septuagint follow:

- “... among the psalms, a song ...” Ps 4.
- “... among the hymns, a psalm ...” Pss 6, 67.
- “... a psalm of a song ...” Pss 30, 48, 68, 75, 87, 92.
- “... a psalm of David, a song.” Ps 65.

<sup>78</sup> For the general unorthodoxy of the Jews of Hellenistic Egypt see, L. H. Feldman, “The Orthodoxy of the Jews of Hellenistic Egypt,” *Jewish Soc. Stud.* xxii, 1960.

<sup>79</sup> See M. P. Nilsson, 1967, *Religion*, 122. The association was called “association of the *therapeutae*.”

<sup>80</sup> See Nilsson, 1967, *Religion*, 127.

<sup>81</sup> It should be remembered that the Septuagint was the “Bible” for Greek speaking Jews and Christians of the time. The apostles often quote from it in the New Testament.



“... a song of a psalm ...” Pss 66, 83, 88, 108.

“... among the hymns, a psalm for (of) Asaph; a song ...” Ps 76.

“... among the hymns of David.” Pss 54, 55, 61.

In addition, the title “song” occurs in Pss 18, 39, 45, 91, 93, 95, 96, 120-34. At the close of book 2 of the Psalter (Ps 72:20) the Septuagint reads: “The hymns of David, the son of Jesse are ended.”<sup>82</sup>

We also find the same kind of varied usage of these three terms in the collection of so-called “Psalms of Solomon” (see § 3.2.2 above).

Josephus also uses the terms “hymn” and “song” to refer to the book of Psalms. When discussing “the remaining four books” of the canon (probably Psalms, Song of Songs, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) he says they contain “hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life” (*Ag.Ap.* 1.40). In *Ant.* 7.305 he notes that “David ... composed songs to God and hymns of varied meter.”<sup>83</sup>

Eusebius (*Hist.eccl.* 1.2.5), in a discussion on the nature of Christ, says: “Another of the prophets confirms this saying, speaking of God somewhere in the hymns.” He proceeds to quote from Ps 148:5. It should be noted that Eusebius also uses the word “psalm” to refer to songs outside the Psalter, but he makes this fact very clear by talking of “new psalms.”<sup>84</sup>

Theodore of Mopsuestia, arguing that the Psalm titles were later additions from Hezekiah and Zerubbabel, said: “I have altogether taken out the titles of the most holy hymns and psalms and songs.”<sup>85</sup>

This smattering of examples should illustrate the point that our three terms are virtually interchangeable in Greek, and that all three could quite easily, and often did, refer to the psalms in the Old Testament Psalter.<sup>86</sup>

## 4.2 Ephesians and Colossians

From the meaning of these particular words, we turn naturally to a pair of texts that have received much discussion in connection with singing in the church, namely, Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16.

Both these letters have much in common and were probably both written around the same time (along with the letter to Philemon), during Paul’s lengthy sojourn in Rome at the end of his recorded career. Given the close relationship between the two letters, we should consider them together. Although Paul was addressing specific problems in his letter to the Colossians, yet he used much the same material found in the more general letter to the Ephesians.

When turning to these two texts on singing, there is one thing that we should realise right at the outset. The apostle Paul was not writing to answer the question we are now asking, namely, which songs we

<sup>82</sup> As noted above (§ 2.4), the probable Hebrew Vorlage was *t<sup>e</sup>hilloth* instead of MT *t<sup>e</sup>philloth*.

<sup>83</sup> The text could be translated “songs and hymns to God ...,” but the word order suggests that the word “songs” is deliberately restricted to a religious context (unnecessary for “hymns” which are religious by definition).

<sup>84</sup> Eusebius is referring to Philo’s tract on the *therapeutae* (see § 3.2.4 above) which he mistakenly took to refer to a group of Christians. In the same context he refers to their songs as ᾠσματα και ὑμνους (“songs and hymns”). It is noteworthy that in the very next paragraph, Eusebius recognises that some may have doubts that the practices he has described are in accord with “the characteristics of the life of the church.”

<sup>85</sup> Cited in E. J. Young, 1949, *Introduction*, 115.

<sup>86</sup> It should perhaps also be noted that I am not saying anything new or controversial in this section.



should sing in public worship. In fact, these texts say nothing specifically regarding the content of song. In both texts Paul uses three common words to describe religious songs, piling up terms for effect (as he does throughout his letters). The point of the texts is basically: Sing! Sing to God. In both cases singing to God is seen as part of the general ministry of thanksgiving that believers return to the Lord for His blessings in Christ (cf. Eph 5:20; Col 3:17).

Yet these general remarks do not stop us from asking the question as to what songs Paul might have been thinking of when he penned these words. In the first place we need to pay attention to the adjective he uses in both cases, “spiritual.” Now this word can, in English, be misleading, for in English the word is often no more than a synonym for “religious.” Yet in the New Testament it always refers quite concretely to the Holy Spirit.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, it is highly probable that the word “spiritual” (or “of the Spirit”) should be read as referring to all three nouns, psalms, hymns, and songs. Thus we should read (in Ephesians) “... singing to each other with Spiritual psalms, hymns and songs ...,” or perhaps better, “singing to each other with psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> In the latter translation we catch something more of the ambiguity of the Greek, and avoid the ambiguous English adjective “spiritual.”

Now these remarks on the description “of the Spirit,” do still not necessarily mean that we have to understand the sense as being “inspired by the Holy Spirit,” though this is a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, any other understanding must take care not to weaken the sense of the word “Spirit.” Conceivably Paul could also have meant that the Ephesians / Colossians were to sing those songs through which the Holy Spirit could be expected to do His transforming work.<sup>89</sup> On balance, however, I believe the simpler explanation is that which sees the songs as songs given by the Holy Spirit (i.e., through prophetic inspiration).

This interpretation is supported by the preceding discussion on the meaning of these three terms, and the fact that all three are so often used as titles in the Septuagint Psalter, the Psalter that would have been in use in all the churches at least outside of Palestine.<sup>90</sup> It is worth remembering that the Psalter is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Furthermore, the citation from Theodore of Mopsuestia above (§ 4.1) clearly shows that at least certain Greek church Fathers generally referred to the Psalter as “the most holy psalms, hymns, and songs.” This is surely a phrase dependent on Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16. Finally, we should also remember that there is no clear evidence of any hymns at all from the first century AD (see also discussion below). If the apostles and early churches had used hymns, would not at least some of them have been handed down to us? Would there not at least be some clear mention of some of them by the early church Fathers?

### **4.3 The First Letter to the Corinthians**

There is only one passage in the New Testament that seems to indicate that contemporary songs might have been sung in public worship, namely, 1 Corinthians 14:26 where Paul assumes the possibility that

<sup>87</sup> Compare, for example, Rom 7:14 where πνευμάτικός (“spiritual”) is contrasted with σάρκικός (“fleshly”): “For we know that the Law is of the Spirit, but I am of the flesh.” See further, BDAG, s.v. πνευμάτικός 2.

<sup>88</sup> The verb “to speak” here refers to singing. Whereas in English we do not normally describe singing as “speaking a song,” this is quite possible in Greek. Although the adjective “spiritual” in the Greek agrees in gender only with the noun “songs,” this may just be a case of attraction to the nearest subject.

<sup>89</sup> This interpretation would then mean that the text simply does not speak to the issue under consideration. It is important to note that no interpretation of these texts can provide proof for the singing of hymns (in the modern sense) in the apostolic churches.

<sup>90</sup> The common language of Palestine in the first century AD is a matter of some debate. There are scholars to be found backing anything from Hebrew, to Aramaic, to Greek.

congregational members along with a teaching, revelation, tongue or interpretation could also come to church with a psalm. What are the possibilities? It is frequently suggested that this text must mean that certain Corinthians must have come up with their own spontaneous psalms. It is possible that some of the Corinthians claimed to have such as a gift of the Spirit. It is also possible, however, in view of vs. 24-25 that certain members of the congregation were coming to worship with psalms from the Psalter to use as admonitions from the Spirit for other members. In either case they may well have regarded themselves as standing in the line of the Levitical prophets of old. Thirdly, it may mean that members brought along a prepared Old Testament psalm to sing (as a solo). There is unfortunately insufficient information to determine what precisely the Corinthians were doing with respect to singing.

#### ***4.4 Songs in Revelation***

The book of the revelation of Jesus Christ to John contains a number of references to singing and also a number of songs midst its unfolding visionary picture of God's (future) redemptive history. Specific references to singing, including at least some text of what was sung, are found in Rev 5:9-10 and 15:3-4. Other probable references to singing may also be found in 4:8; 4:11; 5:12; 5:13; 7:12; 11:17-18; 19:1-7; cf. 14:3. Do these references have any bearing to the issue in hand?

In the first place, we should note that all the references to singing in Revelation take place in the context of the worship of God (and the Lamb) in the great throne room of heaven. The Revelation is not concerned to depict or regulate the worship of the church on earth. We of course may note that the Revelation's depiction of worship in heaven has certain contacts with our worship of God on earth. Just as the angels and other beings praise God in song in heaven, so also we praise Him here on earth as participants in the heavenly temple service (cf. § 1.4.3).

In the second place, it should be noted that in the nature of the case the beings at the throne of heaven (including deceased saints), are sinless, and in God's very presence. The question of the appropriateness of prophetic or Spirit-inspired song versus non-prophetic song is simply not applicable.

In the third place, it should be noticed that the nature of the praise and the contents of the songs mentioned in Revelation have specifically to do with the unfolding drama of the narrative.

Finally, it is interesting that here in the one place in the New Testament where we have the words of certain songs of praise recorded, we only find the continued use of Old Testament imagery and phraseology. This of course very much fits in with the pattern of the book as a whole, but it does at least show the continuing importance of Old Testament imagery in New Testament praise and worship (imagery that is then understood in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ).

#### ***4.5 Songs in the Gospels?***

It is frequently claimed that the Gospel of Luke contains at least two examples of New Testament songs, namely, that of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) and that of Zacharias (Luke 1:68-79). One reason for this claim is the fact that these passages have been sung as songs from quite early on in church history.

But were they in fact written as songs, and do they function as songs within the context of the Gospel of Luke? Clearly if one views Luke as a sort of editor of Gospel materials that were formed in the life and worship of the church as much modern (liberal) New Testament scholarship postulates (thereby dating

the Gospel quite late), then this suggestion is *prima facie* plausible. However, it remains for us to look at the text from a perspective which respects the claims of Luke for the historicity of his Gospel.

We turn firstly to Mary's utterance in Luke 1:46-55. This passage is quite clearly a literary allusion to Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 2:1-10. Luke has modelled the language and structure of the first two chapters of his Gospel on Septuagint style, and in particular on the story of the boy Samuel (apart from Hannah's "prayer," compare also LXX 1 Sam 1:11 with Luke 1:15; and 1 Sam 2:26 with Luke 2:52). The angel apparently gave charge to Zacharias concerning John in words deliberately reminiscent of Hannah's vow to the Lord with respect to Samuel as recorded in the Bible in use at the time. The Septuagint adds in 1 Sam 1:11 "he will not drink wine or strong drink."<sup>91</sup> Mary later praised the Lord in words modelled on Hannah's "prayer." As we have seen above (section 2.3) Hannah's "prayer" is not so much a prayer as a song of praise. It was probably the psalm text she used in conjunction with the votive offering which she brought in the temple.<sup>92</sup> In this respect Mary's utterance of praise reflects the psalm of Hannah. At the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth God's Spirit was especially active enabling Elizabeth to prophesy of Mary that she is the "mother of my Lord." Mary, who may have pondered Old Testament stories of exceptional births, then bursts forth in a psalm of praise modelled on that of Hannah. It does therefore seem appropriate that the New Testament church should add this Spirit-inspired psalm of Mary to its collection of songs for worship.

In the second place, we turn to the passage spoken by Zacharias (Luke 1:68-79). Close analysis of this passage shows that it has a two-fold form. Vs. 68-75 follow the typical pattern of a Jewish *Berakah*, that is a blessing formula beginning with "Blessed be ..." and continued by "just as ...". It was used to praise God, often mentioning his great deeds of salvation.<sup>93</sup> This type of formula was regularly used by Tannaitic Jews (first century AD to c. third century), and held a prominent place also in public worship, being used to open the worship services of synagogues.<sup>94</sup> The New Testament letters show evidence that the New Testament churches also used this formula (adapted to God's great deed of salvation in Jesus Christ), cf. Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pet 1:3-5. Reading through the tractate *Berakoth* in the Mishnah (and other Tannaitic blessing formulae) demonstrates the relative fixity of the form.

Vs. 76-79 of this passage form the prophecy proper concerning the child, John, and his future task. It is important to note that the passage as a whole is announced as a prophecy (v.67), and therefore the blessing formula ought to be seen as an introduction to this prophecy. The form the passage is therefore that of a prophetic revelation, and not that of a song.

From our consideration of these passages we can see that the New Testament contains at least one psalm-text which may be considered appropriate for use within the prophetic song-corpus of God's church.

#### **4.6 Hymns in the Letters?**

It is quite common these days for New Testament scholars to talk about the "hymns" found in the letters of Paul. Of the various portions of Paul's letters singled out for this "honour," none has engendered more

<sup>91</sup> I leave aside the question as to whether or not the Septuagint preserves the original reading.

<sup>92</sup> The "prayer" of Hannah was also considered by Philo to be a "song" (*Deus Imm.* 10).

<sup>93</sup> This type of *Berakah* should thus be distinguished from the blessing that God places upon His own people, e.g., Num 6:24ff.

<sup>94</sup> See discussion above under § 1.4.2. The form itself rests on examples contained throughout the Old Testament, e.g., Gen 14:19-20; Exod 18:10; 2 Sam 18:28; 1 Kgs 8:56; Ps 41:13; 72:48 etc.

discussion than Phil 2:6-11. For our purposes here, I shall use a discussion of this passage as an example and test case for the sort of argumentation involved.<sup>95</sup>

We need first of all to realise what precisely is being argued. There is no evidence to prove that this passage was ever a song, or was ever sung, let alone in public worship. Statements to this effect are always suppositions. What is argued with respect to the passage, is that it represents some kind of deliberate poetical arrangement. There is then the more complex question as to whether it is a piece of poetry which Paul authored himself, or which he quoted. Finally, the supposition is made that this piece of poetry was a song used in worship.

Thus there are basically three questions here which shall be treated separately.

i) Is Phil 2:6-11 some kind of deliberate poetic arrangement that stands out starkly as such from its context? I do not deny that this passage is somewhat of a rhetorical flourish (for which Paul's writings are well known), but the question here is more than that. Does it stand out so obviously that it must be considered to be some kind of poem or song in quotation? In the first place, there is no indication in the text that Paul is quoting something. Further, according to R. P. Martin: "It is a singular fact that it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the unusual literary character of Philippians ii.5-11 was detected and classified."<sup>96</sup> What Martin means here is not that the poetic style was never before detected, but that no one before the twentieth century considered this passage as a separate poem or song. This surely gives some pause for thought. No Greek commentator of the early church recognised a song or poem here! Those people spoke Greek as a daily language and yet they never saw it!<sup>97</sup> What, all of a sudden, has led twentieth century theologians to the great discovery? Here we must see the roots in the theological trends current in this century.

In an essay such as this it is not possible to outline the history of these trends, suffice it to mention a few. In the first place, this interpretation is a direct result of *Formgeschichte* (history of forms), which has led theologians to actively seek out various forms (or *Gattungen*) apparent in the Scriptures. In connection with this, New Testament studies have taken a sharp turn in a liturgical direction. Scholars

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<sup>95</sup> In respect of this, R. P. Martin has a good chapter on the history of literary research on this passage in his book *Carmen Christi* (1967) 24-41. Recently, G. D. Fee (1992, "Philippians") has also come out strongly against the idea that this passage is a hymn. Many of his arguments are similar to mine listed below. J. van Bruggen (*Paulus*, 157-58) has also criticised attempts to find fragments of confessions or hymns in Paul's letters.

I would like to just briefly comment on one other portion of Scripture suggested as a hymnic contender, namely, Eph 5:14. The main reason this passage has been suggested is the fact that it does not appear to be any definite Old Testament quotation. The vagueness of the quotation does not change the fact, however, that Paul uses here a formal Scripture quotation formula which implies the authority of God. There is no real getting round the fact that in Paul's view, Scripture is here being quoted. See B. B. Warfield, (1951) "It says."

<sup>96</sup> *Op.cit.*, 24. Martin himself just leaves this thought hanging, for he is a proponent of the idea that this passage is a hymn.

<sup>97</sup> The reason for this does not lie far away. The Greeks themselves were quite able to distinguish poetical prose from poetry proper. For example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (end of the first century BC) in his treatise on composition (Comp. 11) distinguishes between carefully crafted musical prose and (metred) song. This distinction is especially worked out at § 25 where he insists that composition in regular metres and rhythms is called verse and song and designated to be in rhythm and metre. Poetic prose is distinguished from song by the fact that, although it has rhythms and metres, these are irregular. It cannot be scanned as poetry. It is poetical but not a poem, musical but not a song, cf. Aristid. Or. 1.1; 8 p.49; Lib. Or. 5.2. Similarly Maximus of Tyrus (second century AD) states that the only principal difference between rhetoric and poetry is (quantitative) metre (Max.Tyr. 7.7). See also Isoc. 9.9-11 for similar treatment.

There is, however, a complicating factor. Given that Greeks distinguished poetical prose from poetry and song, we ought to realise that the Greek Psalms in the Septuagint are a prose translation of Hebrew poetry. Was this Greek translation sung in the new Christian churches? If so, metred Greek melodies cannot have been used. If the Septuagint text was sung, then some kind of non-metred Jewish melodies must have been used, cf. the non metred songs in Revelation.

frequently seek to relate all the documents of the New Testament to the church as a worshipping church.<sup>98</sup> Thus elements of the various parts of the liturgy have been “discovered” throughout the New Testament. This comes in conjunction with a late dating of many of the New Testament documents and the emphasis on *Gemeindetheologie* (theology of the congregation) greatly furthered by scholars such as R. Bultmann.<sup>99</sup> Bultmann held that all the New Testament documents were products of the worshipping church. They reflect not the situation and problems of the age of the apostles, but the problems and situations of the later developing church. These later problems are then dressed in the guise of an earlier time. In this way it is possible to contend that many aspects of a developed liturgy are present in the New Testament, and that in fact many liturgical forms are quite simply found in it.

We might also note that the results of research done with these approaches has given anything but a unified picture of the New Testament. Theories abound, but assured solutions are few and far between. Our passage is no exception. Martin notes with respect to Phil 2:6-11: “Of all the attempts at literary analysis which have been surveyed there is none which meets with general agreement.”<sup>100</sup>

ii) Once, however, a passage such as Phil 2:6-11 has been “recognised” as a song or poem, the question then needs to be addressed where Paul quoted it from. Many have argued that the passage is simply un-Pauline, and thus some hymn he picked up from somewhere else.<sup>101</sup> The typical criteria for isolating so-called fragments are, however, highly subjective and mirror the similar criteria used for denying apostolic authorship to many of the New Testament letters (e.g., usage of so-called rare vocabulary, subjective stylistic considerations, etc.). Happily it is more and more being recognised today that such arguments are without substantial foundation. We simply do not possess sufficient data to make these sort of judgements. The Pauline corpus is too small.

iii) Finally, the question as to whether this passage (if seen as a distinct piece of poetry) was used as a song in public worship, whilst it cannot be proved, has been supported by several considerations. It is suggested that the early churches must have developed some form of hymnody. This is buttressed by

<sup>98</sup> An important and very influential book in this respect has been W. Bousset’s *Kyrios Christos*, first published in 1913, (2nd ed., 1921). Bousset wrote as a participant in the religionsgeschichtliche way of thinking. According to S. Neill / T. Wright (1988, *Interpretation*, 176) Bousset’s great contribution to New Testament scholarship was “that he understood the early Christian groups primarily as worshipping communities.” Bousset himself notes in his foreword (p.vii) that “the following work seeks above all to take its point of departure in the practice of the cultus and congregational worship service, and herein to understand the development of the matter” (trans. mine). Bousset was himself interested in tracing the history of Jesus’ title “kyrios.” The liturgical development, however, lies in the same background.

<sup>99</sup> Bultmann himself was only developing ideas found for example in Bousset’s *Kyrios Christos*. One is constantly amazed reading through Bousset, for example, at how theologically creative he thought the early congregations could be. They appear to have invented one thing after another and then quickly retrojected these into the life and experience of Christ in a way so as to convince others that this was what Jesus really did, was, and is. Of course they weren’t clever enough to disguise their creativity from men such as Bousset or Bultmann!

<sup>100</sup> *Op.cit.*, 36.

<sup>101</sup> Some even go so far as to suggest that Paul picked up this hymn from non-Christian sources. G. D. Fee (1992, “Philippians,” 35) provides the following list:

- α. Heterodox Judaism (Lohmeyer)
- β. Iranian myth of the Heavenly Redeemer (Beare)
- χ. Hellenistic, pre-Christian Gnosticism (Kausemann)
- δ. Jewish Gnosticism (J. A. Sanders)
- ε. OT Servant passages (Coppens, Moule, Strimple)
- φ. Genesis account of Adam (Murphy-O’Connor, Dunn)
- γ. Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom speculation (Georgi)



the evidence provided in a letter of Pliny the Younger referring to a *carmen Christo* ("song to Christ") in the context of worship.<sup>102</sup> In fact the influence of the passage in Pliny has been so great that Phil 2:6-11 is now commonly referred to as a *carmen Christi* ("song of Christ"). The weakness of this whole argument can be seen in the fact that there are no indications that any of these passages isolated as hymns in the New Testament letters were ever used as songs by the early church. If hymns had existed in the apostolic period, and especially if the apostles themselves had quoted from them, then surely they would have been preserved by the early church, or at least given a mention?!

#### **4.7 Redemptive Historical Argument?**

It is often argued that as a New Testament church we surely need to be singing about the facts of redemption which God accomplished in Jesus Christ. The argument is that in the Old Testament God's people sang of His redemption and deliverance (cf. Ps 78), and so also we need now to sing of the mighty works of God accomplished in Christ. A number of considerations, however, show that this argument ought not to be too far pressed.

In the first place one may just as easily turn the argument around and ask: If it was so important to sing of God's mighty deeds in Christ with newly composed songs, why didn't the apostles provide these? Why don't the apostles mention this necessity? Why are such songs lacking in the apostolic and sub-apostolic church? It is indeed a striking fact that no hymns extolling the redemption in Christ have come down to us from the first generations of the early church, let alone from the apostles.

The answer to the question why the early church does not appear to have concerned itself with such hymns may be found in the fact that it was the very psalms themselves that the apostles used to speak of the mighty deeds of God in Christ, for example Acts 2:25ff and 13:35 showing Ps 16 to be a prophecy of Christ's resurrection; 2:34-35 showing Ps 110 to be prophetic vision of God the Father inviting Jesus to sit at His right hand after the ascension into heaven; 4:25ff using Ps 2 as a prophetic reference to the opposition against Christ; 13:33 using Ps 2 as a prophecy of the resurrection; 17:31 using Ps 9:8 LXX of the second coming to judge the world; Heb 1:1-14 using Pss 2, 104, 45, 102, and 110 to show the superiority of the Son above the angels; Heb 2:6ff using Ps 8 as a prophecy of Christ's humiliation and exaltation; 2:11ff demonstrating from Ps 22 Christ's humanity; 10:5ff showing how Ps 40 refers to Christ's suffering! In this they were only following the example of Christ himself. See, for example, Mark 12:10ff (and parallels) where Christ quotes Ps 118 in reference to his rejection and subsequent exaltation; Mark 12:35ff (and parallels) where Christ quotes Ps 110 to show his superiority to David. It is notable that the Psalter is the most quoted book of the Old Testament within the New Testament. The imagery of the Old Testament psalms was simply applied to Jesus Christ. This is also what we have seen from the songs in the book of Revelation.

In the second place we ought not to forget the important place which was given to the prophetic approbation and collection of the five books of the Psalter. This Psalter became the foundation of singing in worship in the Jewish church after Old Testament prophecy had ceased. Even after the great deliverance of God under the Maccabees (second century BC), no new songs were composed to celebrate this.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. R. P. Martin, *op.cit.*, 37. Pliny (c. AD 61 - c.112), appointed Roman governor of Bithynia-Pontus c. AD 110, wrote emperor Trajan of information he had gathered from local Christians whom he compelled to curse Christ or suffer the death penalty. He briefly describes a worship service wherein a song is sung to Christ as if to a god (*carmen Christo quasi deo*). It cannot be determined from Pliny's Latin what the content of the song was. That the song was sung to Christ does not help us much. Pliny does not say that the song was about Christ. His point is that the man Jesus Christ is worshipped as if he were a god. C. J. Kraemer (1934, "Pliny") has argued that we have to do here with the chanting of an Old Testament psalm, although ultimately his conclusion must remain supposition.

As noted above, the Holy Spirit was using these songs of the Psalter to show that none other than Jesus was the prophesied Christ in his incarnation, suffering, resurrection and exaltation. It is therefore not surprising that the apostle Paul when encouraging the congregations at Ephesus and Colossia to sing, especially mentions “psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit,” a probable reference to the Spirit-inspired songs of the Psalter which had formed the basis of apostolic teaching concerning Christ.

In conclusion then, we ought to be careful with a theological argument such as this, especially when there is such a lack of evidence that the apostles and early church ever felt the weight of such a consideration. The argument fails to do justice to the way in which the psalms themselves are used in the New Testament.<sup>103</sup>

## 5. General conclusions and the Question of Translation

We have seen above that singing has been an important element of God’s public worship right from the beginning. In the Old Testament we have seen evidence of singing by Levitical choirs, by the congregation, and also by individual (families or groups of) worshippers. In the time of David the Lord heightened the impact of Levitical singing in His temple worship by the installation of Levitical prophets who through the medium of song could give the people prophetic instruction and, on occasion, a prophetic answer to their prayer requests.

Out of the song material used in God’s public worship in Old Testament times, a five volume collection of prophetically approved songs was eventually put together which became the songbook of the church when prophecy ceased. As an inspired prophetic songbook it also became the primary source for showing and demonstrating that Jesus was indeed the promised Christ (Messiah). The work of God’s Son was seen to be foreshadowed in the psalms, which continued to be sung and used extensively for doctrine and life in the apostolic church. The same principles of covenant worship which God gave His church of old, applied also to the apostolic church. The great difference was the recognition of Jesus as the Christ. By His death and resurrection, temple worship was fulfilled. The reality of Christ’s atonement replaced the shadows of sacrificial ritual. The local weekly public worship received a sacramental character with the regular celebration of Christ’s sacrifice in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Just as singing had always accompanied the bringing of sacrifices in the temple, in the Christian church singing remained an important aspect of worship centred around the sacrament of the sacrificial meal of Christ.

We have also seen above that the New Testament did not initially provide any impulse for the production of new song material. The apostles treasured the psalms as inspired songs speaking of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Singing in New Testament worship ought, therefore, to reflect this emphasis. Christ ought to be confessed and sung, in the first place, through the divine Psalter. This means that each generation anew needs to learn to read and sing the psalms from a Christological perspective. Only this will prevent the church from slowly giving up the Psalter for an ever increasing collection of modern hymns—a trend which eventually in practice leads to dispensational thinking.

That is not to say, however, that the singing of songs outside of the Psalter in Christ’s church must be principally denied. Just as in Old Testament worship not all the songs sung were given by Levitical prophets, so also in New Testament times we overstate the demands of Scripture if we emphatically disallow anything but Old Testament psalms to be sung. Nevertheless the emphasis placed upon these psalms by the apostles, and the apparent absence of hymnody in the New Testament church should lead us to caution. Whilst there can be no principal objection to a carefully selected small group of

<sup>103</sup> Part of the appeal of the argument to many may probably be attributed to lack of knowledge of the psalms (and the New Testament usage of them), resulting in congregational singing without understanding (cf. 1 Cor 14:15).

songs intended as supplement to the Psalter, it should be clear that the prophetically approved psalms ought to remain the staple diet of the church's singing in worship.

There remains one pertinent practical question. How should the churches sing the psalms? Although the Scriptures do not regulate the kind of melody to be used, is it, for example, permitted to sing the psalms in rhymed metre?

Here we come to the more general question of how to translate biblical poetry. Simply stated, should not poetry be translated as poetry? The (lengthy) preface to the Bay Psalm Book of 1640 also dealt with this question and gave what I consider an excellent answer:

*The psalms are penned in such verses as are suitable to the poetry of the Hebrew Language, and not in the common style of such other books of the Old Testament as are not poetical; now no protestant doubts but that all the books of the Scripture should by God's ordinance be extant in the mother tongue of each nation, that they may be understood of all, hence the psalms are to be translated into our English tongue; and if in our English tongue we are to sing them, then as all our English songs (according to the course of our English poetry) do run in metre, so ought David's psalms to be translated into metre, that so we may sing the Lord's songs, as in our English tongue so in such verses as are familiar to an English ear which are commonly metrical: and as it can be no just offence to any good conscience to sing David's Hebrew songs in English words, so neither to sing his poetical verses in English poetical metre:*<sup>104</sup>

We need of course to be careful that any translation, whether rhymed or prose, be as accurate as possible. No translation is perfect, and yet the translation of the Scriptures is a proper and necessary task. The apostles saw the necessity of translating Hebrew into Greek, and they often settled for a fairly loose translation at that! They also had no problem in making use of the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament current in their day, known as the Septuagint. Despite its failings in places, it was still considered as Holy Scripture.

Another practical aspect relating to how the psalms should be sung is the antiphonal nature of many of the psalm texts. As noted in § 2.3 many of the psalms were written to be sung in turn by the worshipper(s), Levitical choir and priest(s). Given this fact there can be no objection to singing these psalms antiphonally. Singing in public worship may never exclude the praise of the whole congregation, but the appropriate use of choirs or even solo singing ought not to be denied on any grounds of principle.

In conclusion it is hoped that this paper will act as a stimulus to further thinking on the question of singing in worship. In the years since I first endeavoured to write this paper my thinking has slowly but surely been deepened by ever continuing study of God's Word. I remain open to readers who wish to interact with this paper and hope that thereby a deeper understanding and dedication to the worship of our Lord and Saviour may be achieved. In particular it is hoped that the reader may be stimulated to study and use the Psalter in the worship of Christ's church.

God be praised. Amen.

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<sup>104</sup> I have modernised the spelling. There is no pagination in the original edition.

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