



Singing in Worship

There are three categories of biblical songs: psalms, hymns (directly addressed to God), and spiritual songs. Singing is the expression of a believer in a local church. Singing is best expressed based on the Bible doctrine in the believer's soul. It has greatest meaning when the singer is spiritually mature. Singing, like everything worthwhile in the spiritual life, should always be done while filled with the Holy Spirit. Eph. 5:18.

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,” (Ephesians 5:18, NASB)

In Colossians 3:16, singing is preceded by “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” which refers to Bible doctrine in the soul. Singing is an expression of doctrine in the soul expressing itself outwardly with people as the chief benefactor. The Greek terms indicate that singing is vocal and to be accompanied with instruments.

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16, NASB)

In Colossians 3:16, we find what singing accomplishes toward other believers within a congregation. The Greek word διδάσκω (didaskō) means to teach. Singing is designed as a teaching tool. The Greek word νουθετέω (noutheteō) means to admonish, to remind, to put in mind, to warm, to exhort. Singing is designed as an admonishing tool. Therefore, singing has the following factors: praise to God, teaching of each other through singing, warning, encouraging, and exhorting each other through singing.

In Ephesians 5:19, singing is an expression of the soul of one who is filled with the Spirit and it is chiefly directed toward God. Emphasis is on the proper attitude of the soul.

“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;” (Ephesians 5:19, NASB)

In Revelation 5:9, singing relates to the Church Age believer and is seen to be occurring in heaven in connection with victory or conquering. Singing is said to be done unto the Lord. Although it will benefit the congregation, their benefit will glorify the Lord.

“And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9, NASB)

What Singing is Not

Singing is not the measure of spirituality or vigor of a local church. The filling of the Spirit is necessary for singing, but singing is no proof of the filling of the Spirit. Singing in a local church is not designed to be used to create a mood for the soul, but rather is an expression of that which the filling of the Spirit and Bible doctrine have already created in the soul. Singing is not to be measured by the quantity of zeal employed, but by the understanding accompanying it. 1 Cor. 14:15.

“What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.” (1 Corinthians 14:15, NASB)



Singing is not designed to give you a good feeling. If it is praise, it is directed to God. If it is teaching, it is designed for your learning. If it is admonishment, it is designed for your warning, comfort, challenge, and motivation.

Singing is not the primary function in a worship service of a local church. Spirituality and teaching Bible doctrine are the primary functions. Singing should not be your motive for attendance of a church. Some people say, “I go there because the singing is so great. I can even tolerate the message.”

English and Greek Words Related to Singing

Song: ᾠδή (ōdē): A song in praise of God or Christ. This word has the adjective “spiritual” attached to it. The Greek word can mean any kind of song, a battle song, a harvest song, a festal song, etc. Therefore, the term “spiritual” is added to limit the kind of song which can be sung. A good number of the songs in hymn books would be classified by this term “spiritual songs.” Eph. 5:9; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; Rev. 14:3. A song taught by Moses and Christ. Rev. 15:3.

“(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),” (Ephesians 5:9, NASB)

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“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.” (Revelation 14:3, NASB)

“And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!” (Revelation 15:3, NASB)

Sing: ᾄδω (adō): To sing or chant to the praise of anyone. Rev. 5:9; Rev. 14:3; Rev. 15:3. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, it is used as the lyrical emotion of a devout and grateful soul.

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Melody: ψάλλω (psallō): To twang the strings of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate. To play on a stringed instrument. To play on a harp. In the New Testament, it means to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God. Eph. 5:19; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; James 5:13.

“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;” (Ephesians 5:19, NASB)

“and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.”” (Romans 15:9,



NASB)

"What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also." (1 Corinthians 14:15, NASB)

"Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." (James 5:13, NASB)

Hymn: ὕμνος (humnos): A song or direct address of praise to God. A sacred hymn. Used in isagogical literature as a song in praise of gods, heroes and conquerors. Augustine gives three essentials to a hymn - it must be sung, it must be praise, and it must be to God. Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16.

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Singing a Hymn: ὑμνέω (humneō): To sing, to laud, to sing a hymn of praise. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Heb. 2:12.

"After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30, NASB)

"After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Mark 14:26, NASB)

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;" (Acts 16:25, NASB)

"saying, 'I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.'" (Hebrews 2:12, NASB)

Music: συμφωνία (sumphōnia): To sound together, be in accord, sounds of musical instruments. In the New Testament, it means to harmonize, to agree together, to agree with one in making a bargain, to make an agreement. Luke 15:25.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing." (Luke 15:25, NASB)

A Brief History of Hymnology

Hymns, sacred odes, and poems were intended to be sung in praise or prayer to deities. A tablet dating 800 BC contains a Sumerian hymn on the creation. A large body of early Christian hymns was written by men such as St. John of Damascus and St. Ambrose of Milan.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, there arose a demand for congregational singing. This first expressed itself in spiritual songs and carols. During the Renaissance period (1501 AD), the first forerunner to the modern hymnal was published at Prague for the Moravian Brethren.

Martin Luther (1523 -1546 AD) and his followers created a considerable collection of chorales which rank among the finest congregational hymns. Under John Calvin at Geneva, the musical reformation developed hymns based on metrical paraphrases of Psalms prepared in French by Clement Marot and Theodore de Bèze between 1539-1562 AD and were translated by Ambrosius Lobwasser for the Reformed Church in Germany.

In England, the hymns of the congregation were limited almost exclusively to metrical Psalms prepared



by Thomas Steinhold and John Hopkins from 1549-1562 AD. They continued in predominance until 1696 AD.

Evangelical hymnology began at the end of the 17th century. In the Lutheran Church, the Pietism Movement started a fresh wave of hymn writing. In England, John and Charles Wesley began what later became the most popular evangelical hymnology of the English speaking world.

John Wesley's first, "Collection of Psalms & Hymns" was published in 1737 at Charlestown, South Carolina. Charles Wesley, John's brother, wrote 6,500 hymns. Isaac Watts, a contemporary English hymn writer, wrote "Hymns and Spiritual Songs" (1707-09) and has been called the creator of the modern English hymn.

Reformation hymns had the texts prepared with no particular tune in mind and a separate musician would write music for a number of them that fit the meter. One such music writer was Louis Bourgeois of Geneva. Tunes given to lyrics were also later given certain names or designations.

Music and Singing in the Old Testament

Music and singing accompanied the departing of honored guests. Gen. 31:27.

"Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre;" (Genesis 31:27, NASB)

Music was used in signaling the triumph over a nation's enemy. Exodus 15:20.

"Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing." (Exodus 15:20, NASB)

Music welcomed conquerors in victory. Judges 11:34.

"When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter." (Judges 11:34, NASB)

Music was used in casting out evil spirits. 1 Sam. 18:10.

"Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand." (1 Samuel 18:10, NASB)

Music was used to excite inspiration of a prophet and soothe the temper. 2 Kings 3:15.

"But now bring me a minstrel." And it came about, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him." (2 Kings 3:15, NASB)

The Hebrew indicates many types of emotional involvement in music. Jeering songs against Job in Job 30:9. Joy and sorrow. Hope and fear. Doubt and faith.

"And now I have become their taunt, I have even become a byword to them." (Job 30:9, NASB)

The Jews were commanded to sing one of their famous songs while in captivity in Psalms 137:3.

"For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'" (Psalms 137:3, NASB)

In latter Jewish Old Testament times, music formed as essential part of the national worship of Jehovah. Many arrangements were made for its best performance. For example, they would recite the many



genealogies found in 1 Chronicles. The whole body of the temple chorus and orchestra numbered 4,000. They were trained and conducted in 24 divisions by three men – Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. The trained and untrained were combined in function. The trained provided the tradition and quality for the untrained to learn in.

At each reformation in the Jewish National Religion under Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah, the reconstruction of the temple chorus and orchestra with their duties was properly accomplished. 2 Chron. 29:25; 2 Chron. 34; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:27.

“He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets.” (2 Chronicles 29:25, NASB)

“Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel.” (Ezra 3:10, NASB)

“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres.” (Nehemiah 12:27, NASB)

Musical Instruments of the Old Testament

Musical instruments of the Old Testament fall into three groups: string, wind, and percussion.

The lyre, כִּנּוֹר (kinnôr) was a stringed instrument used for popular and sacred music. 1 Sam. 16:16. It was used at banquets in Isaiah 5:12. It was the usual accompaniment for a song. 1 Chron. 15:16.

“Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well.” (1 Samuel 16:16, NASB)

“Their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they consider the work of His hands.” (Isaiah 5:12, NASB)

“Then David spoke to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives the singers, with instruments of music, harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.” (1 Chronicles 15:16, NASB)

The harp, נָבֶל (nebel) was a musical instrument, either a portable harp or guitar with ten strings played at feasts, in worship, and in religious ceremonies. It was cheaper and more common than the lyre, which was a mark of luxury. 2 Sam. 6:5; 2 Chron.

“Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals.” (2 Samuel 6:5, NASB)

The horn or trumpet, שׁוֹפָר (shophar) was a curved horn of a species of wild goat and was mostly used in war and rarely used as a sacred instrument. Hosea 8:1; Joshua 6:5; Joshua 6:20.

“Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the LORD, Because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law.” (Hosea 8:1, NASB)



“It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead.” (Joshua 6:5, NASB)

“So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.” (Joshua 6:20, NASB)

The horn שופר (shophar) was used on religious occasions. Joshua 6:4; 2 Chron. 16:14.

“Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.” (Joshua 6:4, NASB)

“They buried him in his own tomb which he had cut out for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the resting place which he had filled with spices of various kinds blended by the perfumers' art; and they made a very great fire for him.” (2 Chronicles 16:14, NASB)

The horn, קרן (qeren) was a wind instrument. Joshua 6:5.

“It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead.” (Joshua 6:5, NASB)

The trumpet or sacred instrument, חצצרה (châtsôtserâh) was a long slender tube with a flaring end made of metal, often called a clarion. It was used especially by the priests. It was used to gather the congregation together or on festivals and over sacrifices. It was used for sounding the alarm and for battle. Hosea 5:8; Psalms 98; 1 and 2 Chronicles.

“Blow the horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah. Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: “Behind you, Benjamin!”” (Hosea 5:8, NASB)

The flute, חליל (châlîyl) was used to signal the people with instrumental music. 1 Sam. 10:5; Isaiah 5:12.

“Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying.” (1 Samuel 10:5, NASB)

“Their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they consider the work of His hands.” (Isaiah 5:12, NASB)

The pipe organ, עוגב (‘ûgâb) was a musical instrument a reed pipe or flute of sensuous or appealing tones. An instrument made of several reeds together, i.e. a pipe organ, bag-pipe. Some classify it as a stringed instrument also. Psalms 150:4.

“Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.” (Psalms 150:4, NASB)

The tambourine, or timbrel, תוף (tôph) was held and struck with the hand. It was often used with other musical instruments in making merry, for triumph, by prophets in ecstasy, and for praise. Jer. 31:4; Job. 21:12; 1 Sam. 10:5; 1 Chron. 13:8.



"Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! Again you will take up your tambourines, And go forth to the dances of the merry-makers." (Jeremiah 31:4, NASB)

"They sing to the timbrel and harp And rejoice at the sound of the flute." (Job 21:12, NASB)

"David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets." (1 Chronicles 13:8, NASB)

Cymbals, מְצִלְתַּיִם (metsiltayim) and צִלְצְלִים (tseltselim) were used in celebrations. 1 Chron. 13:8; 1 Chron. 15:16; 1 Chron. 15:28; 2 Sam. 6:5.

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"Then David spoke to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives the singers, with instruments of music, harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals, to raise sounds of joy." (1 Chronicles 15:16, NASB)

"Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, and with sound of the horn, with trumpets, with loud-sounding cymbals, with harps and lyres." (1 Chronicles 15:28, NASB)

Castanets, מְנַעֲנָע (mena'na') were a kind of rattle much used in Egypt. A small metal frame with loose metal bars carrying loose rings, swung and shaken by the hand. 2 Sam. 6:5.

"Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals." (2 Samuel 6:5, NASB)

The triangle, שָׁלִישׁ (shalish) was a three stringed, three barred, or three cornered musical instrument. 1 Sam. 18:6.

"It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments." (1 Samuel 18:6, NASB)

The flute, מַשְׂרוּקִי (mashrôqîy) or whistle or pipe was used for whistling or piping for flocks. Dan. 3:5.

"that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up." (Daniel 3:5, NASB)

The Trigon, סַבְבָּא (sabbekâ') was a triangular instrument with four strings. Dan. 3:5; Dan. 3:7; Dan. 3:10; Dan. 3:15.

"that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up." (Daniel 3:5, NASB)

"You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image." (Daniel 3:10, NASB)

The Psaltery, פֶּסַנְטֵרִינ (pesantêrîyn) was a triangular stringed instrument. Dan. 3:7.

"Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and



worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” (Daniel 3:7, NASB)

The bagpipe, סומפֿוניה (sûmpôneyâh) was a double pipe. Dan 3:5; Dan 3:15.

“that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.” (Daniel 3:5, NASB)

““Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”” (Daniel 3:15, NASB)