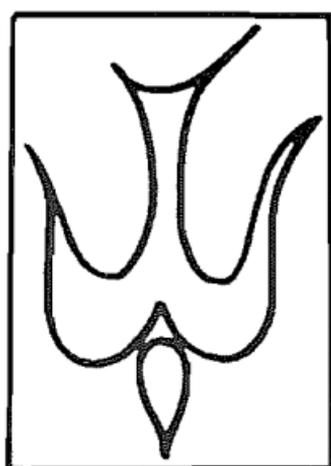
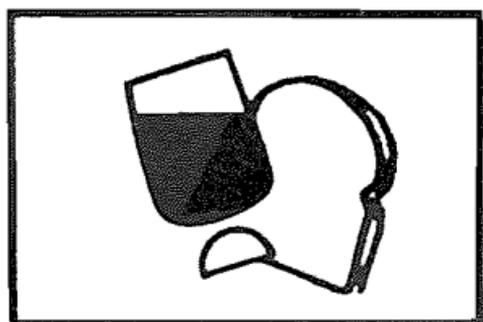
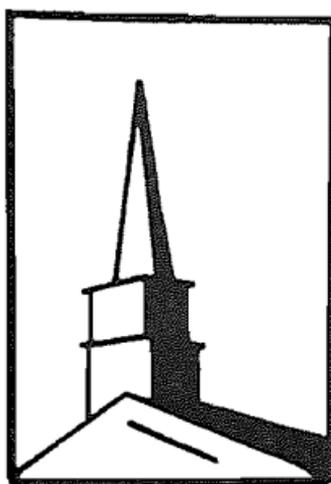
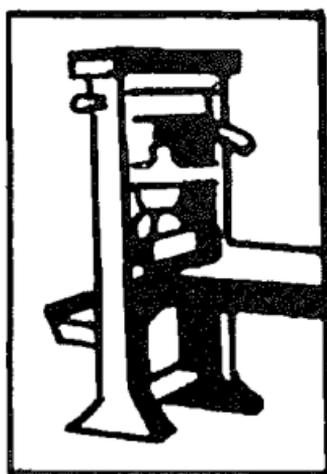
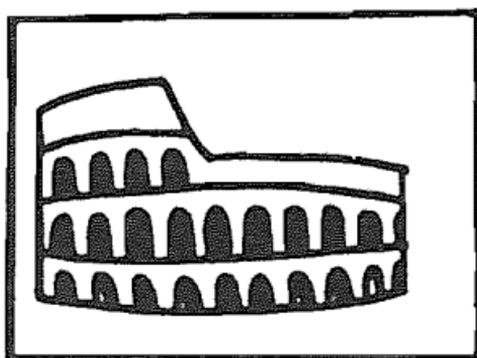


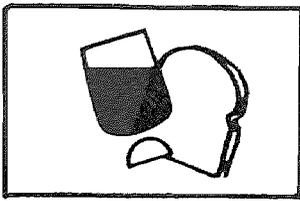
And when they
had sung a hymn,
they went out into
the Mount of
Olives . . .

Matt. 26:30



**WHAT
HYMN?**





Praise at the Last Supper

In Matthew 26:30 we read "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." What was the hymn that our Lord and His disciples sang before they went to the Mount of Olives? Has this hymn been used in the church since that time? Would the Lord's people have any interest in singing it today?

An esteemed writer of Christian literature for children exclaims, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we knew what hymn they sang!" It would! And in fact there is a great deal of evidence concerning the identity of this hymn.

Our Lord and His disciples were in the Upper Room, observing the passover. At a certain point in the feast our Lord instituted the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which was to take the place of the Passover until He comes again. "Four cups of wine, the Mishna tells us, were always drunk . . . They also always sang the Hallel, or praise-psalms, consisting of all the Psalms in our Bible from the 113th to the 118th inclusive. The first part, including the 113th and 114th Psalms, was sung early in the meal, and the 115th, 116th, 117th, and 118th Psalms at the close, after the fourth or last cup of wine had been drunk. This is the "hymn" alluded to (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26) when it is said, 'And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.'"¹

Our Lord left the Upper Room knowing full well what was immediately ahead of Him. As they united their voices in the final hymn of the Great Hallel, the 118th Psalm, He and the disciples sang, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

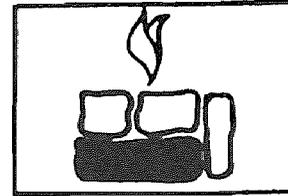
Save now, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord.

God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee.

O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

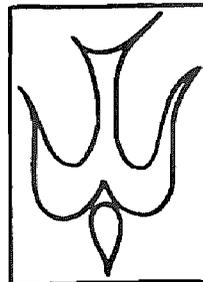
With those words of praise upon His lips, our Saviour concluded the sacramental experience of the Upper Room and faced Gethsemane and the Cross.



Praise in the Old Testament

Most Christians recognize that the Old Testament believers sang praise to God with Psalms and were commanded to do so. "Make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." (Psalm 95:2) "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him." (Psalm 105:2) "Sing unto the Lord with . . . the voice of a psalm." (Psalm 98:5) The Psalms were given by Almighty God as the means of praise for the Old Testament Church. Our Lord also, during His years upon earth, in His worship in the home, the synagogue and the temple sang songs contained in the Book of Psalms.²

In recent history the impression has arisen that somehow they are not suitable for New Testament worship. The "hymn" which our Lord and the disciples sang in the Upper Room, The Great Hallel, the 113th to the 118th Psalms, has special relevance for this misconception. "This may be said to mark the point at which the Psalter passed over from the old dispensation into the new; for it accompanied the celebration of the new ordinance of the Lord's Supper as well as the celebration of the expiring passover."³



Praise in the New Testament

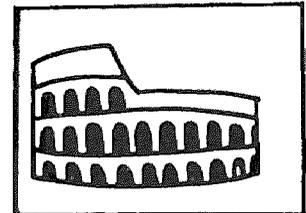
That the ancient songs of the Hebrew Psalter were used as the praise of the New Testament church, is made evident by the number of references to the Psalms in the New Testament. Our Lord declared, "These are the words which I spake unto you . . . that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44). Peter, in his first sermon, at Pentecost, based his message

on two Psalms, the 16th and the 110th. These were the texts God used in bringing three thousand souls to salvation. In Paul's first recorded discourse he appeals to two Psalms, Psalms 2 and 116. The Epistle to the Hebrews is full of arguments from the Psalms concerning the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. James writes, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." (James 5:13).

As new churches were formed, many members were added who had not been trained in Old Testament worship and praise, but came directly from heathenism. How should these new believers worship as Christians? In his letters to the Greek speaking Christians at both Ephesus and Colossae, the Apostle Paul wrote similar instructions: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3:16) What did he mean by this?

Although these new Christians were not Hebrew speaking, the Old Testament Scriptures were available in their own Greek language — in what was called the "Septuagint" translation, because it was translated into Greek by seventy Jewish scholars.

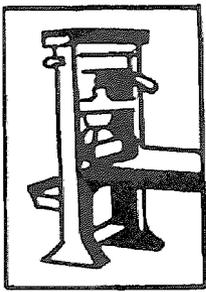
In the Book of Psalms in the "Septuagint" translation, sixty-seven are labelled "psalms." Six are entitled "hymns." Thirty-five are called "spiritual songs." Some are designated as a "psalm and a hymn." Others have the heading "a psalm and a spiritual song." The 76th carries all three titles — "a psalm, a hymn, and a spiritual song." It becomes apparent that the inspired apostle was directing the churches at Ephesus and Colossae to use the entire collection of one hundred and fifty Psalms in their public worship.



Praise in the Early Church

The Psalms continued to be used as the manual of praise in the early Christian church. "The important Council of Laodicea, which met about 360 A.D., forbade 'the singing of uninspired hymns in the church, and the reading of the upcanonical books of Scripture (canon 59).'"⁴

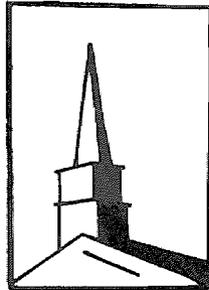
"The Council of Chalcedon, which met almost a century later (451 A.D.), one of the largest and most important of all the ecumenical councils, confirmed this canon of the Laodicean Synod."⁵



Praise in the Reformation

As time went on, corruptions crept into the church. As men departed from any God-given prescriptions for His Church, they also departed from the singing of the Psalms. More and more, songs of merely human composition were to be found in the worship of the church; although the Psalms were not abandoned entirely.

With the coming of the Protestant Reformation, and the accompanying interest in returning to Biblical practices, there was a great and joyous return to the exclusive use of the Psalms in worship by the Reformed churches. John Calvin and John Knox, in the years of their public ministries, used nothing but the Psalms in worship. The Huguenots sang them generation after generation. The Waldenses sang them in their mountain homes in Italy. The Psalms were the battle hymns of the Covenanters as they fought for religious liberty in Scotland. The Puritans brought their **Ainsworth Psalm Books** with them to America. The first book to be printed in the English colonies was the **Bay Psalm Book**.



Praise in the Church Today

During the last century the Psalms have again fallen into disuse among most Christians, and regard for the authority of the Scriptures is again at a low ebb. But contemporary Christians, introduced to Psalm singing, are impressed with their relevance to today's problems. Amid all the confusion of voices about us, the Lord's people can still sing, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" and know it is God's promise. In these days of a frightening increase in mental illness, we can claim the promise of Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden upon the Lord,

and he will sustain you." When the foundations of Western culture seem uncertain and shaking, the child of God can affirm, "Nevertheless I am continually with you: You have held me by my right hand." (Psalm 73:2) and know that the promise has stood the test of most of recorded history.

There is abundant reason for us to sing the Psalms in the worship of God. God, by His Holy Spirit, inspired them and commanded their use. Our Lord sang them, as the songs that met His need on that night in which He was betrayed. The Apostle Paul, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, directed congregations of the early church to use them. In later centuries the church, in its periods of greatest purity, has rejoiced to use the Psalms as its songs of praise.

In the words of the inspired writer of Scripture, "Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him."
(I Chronicles 16:9)

NOTES

1. A. A. Hodge: **Popular Lectures On Theological Themes** (Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1887) p. 396.
See also:
John Peter Lange: **The Gospel According to Matthew** (Critical, Doctrinal, and Practical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures) Charles Scribners, 1864. p. 473.
G. Campbell Morgan: **The Gospel According To Matthew** (Fleming H. Revell Co., 1929) p. 300.
2. W. E. Wishart: **The Psalms In Worship** (United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907) "The Psalms The Manual Of Praise" p. 54.
3. William Binnie: **The Psalms, Their History, Teaching, and Use** (London, 1877) cit. "The Psalms In Worship" p. 151.
4. John A. Wilson: **The Psalms In Worship** (United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907) "The Psalms In The Post-Apostolic Church", pp. 166-167.
5. John A. Wilson: *Ibid*, p. 167.

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