

Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs

Script to the teaching at the workshop in Lahti, Finland, 21.-25.7.17

- With the words "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" the numbers according to "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible" will be given for further personal study (noun and verb form)
- If not otherwise noted the definitions will be given according to the New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon

(Key verses: Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16)

Eph. 5:19

Speaking to yourselves in **psalms** and **hymns** and **spiritual songs**, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

Col.3:16

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.

I. Psalms

Definition – noun:

"Psalm" means in its original meaning: a striking, twanging, specifically of chords of a harp; then a song of praise; "The phrase ἔχει ψαλμόν is used of one who has it in his heart to sing or recite a song of the sort.

1 Corinthians 14:26; one of the songs of the book of the O. T. which is entitled ψαλμοί." (psalmoi)

Psalmós – a psalm ("scripture set to music"). Originally, a psalm (**psalmos – 5568**) was sung and accompanied by a plucked musical instrument (typically a harp), especially the OT Psalms.

The Psalms of the OT were often sung and were accompanied by sophisticated musical arrangements. (HELPS Word-Studies)

1-4. According to the first 4 occurrences in **Lk. 20:42; 24:44 and Acts 1:20; 13:33** "psalms" refers to the written book of Psalms – which was also sung in the OT and at Jesus' times. "By *psalms* may be meant David's psalms, or such composures as were fitly sung with musical instrumentsm" (Geneva Bible Notes)

5. 1. Cor. 14:26:

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

"...each one has a psalm..." seems to imply a psalm from the book of Psalms, thus spoken. But compared with Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 it is more probable that some psalm or song was sung to the glory of God and for the edification of the church. It is listed among other important things each member of the church had when being gathered together. The Corinthian church just did not use these spiritual things to the edification of the church but rather used them to show off their great ability. According to Mathew Henry's notes the verse should be translated: "

"You are apt to confound the several parts of worship; and, while one has a psalm to utter by inspiration, another has a doctrine, or revelation;" or else, "You are apt to be confused in the same branch of worship, many of you having psalms or doctrines to propose at the same time, without staying for one another. Is not this perfect uproar? Can this be edifying? And yet all religious exercises in public assemblies should have this view, Let all things be done to edifying."

Paul just lists different activities in a fellowship which could be done by believers. The list is not complete. The context implies that these activities should be done via the spirit in each believer. One is having a psalm, a song of praise which may be accompanied by an instrument.

This is clearly set forth in Ephesians and Colossians.

6. Eph. 5:19:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

..." speaking to yourselves..." seems to indicate that no singing is involved. But the word should be translated differently from the Greek.

Speaking - **λαλοῦντες** *laleo* 1. *sound, give forth sounds or tones* of inanimate things (Gingrich) ((see Rev. 4:1)

This first meaning of **λαλοῦντες** shows that the speaking was in the form of singing and playing. The German "Einheitsübersetzung" translates:

^{EIN} Ephesians 5:19:

Laßt in eurer Mitte Psalmen, Hymnen und Lieder erklingen, wie der Geist sie eingibt. Singt und jubelt aus vollem Herzen zum Lob des Herrn! (i.e.: „Let psalms, hymns and songs, as the spirit gives, sound forth amongst yourselves.“ - Einheitsübersetzung – own translation)

"singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts." (The New Living Translation)

From the second part of the verse it is clear that Paul talked about singing.

According to Eph. 5:19 it is evident that this is a command and ordinance given to the church. When being assembled together the church should sound forth psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

From the beginning, praise was an important part of public worship.

It is put in opposition to verse 18: "being not drunk with wine", referring to the assemblies of the church. (This had actually happened in the Corinthian Church during their love feasts, and Paul does not applaud to it.)

The Geneva Bible makes the following comment on verse 18/19:

Geneva Bible Notes:

"He sets the sober and holy assemblies of the faithful against the immoral banquets of the unfaithful, in which the praises of the only Lord must ring, whether it is in prosperity or diversity."

In Colossians we have the last usage of "psalms":

7. ^{DBY} Col. 3:16:

Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, in **psalms**, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. (Darby Translation)

^{NIB} Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing **psalms**, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (New International Bible)

Definition - verb form:

"making melody" (**psalo, psallontes - 5567**) is the verb form of the Greek word for psalms. The word is used 5x in the NT and refers to singing praises to God. (Thayer's)

1. Rom. 15:9

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and **sing (psalo)** unto thy name.

2&3. 1.Cor. 14:15 (2x)

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will **sing (psalo)** with the spirit, and I will **sing (psalo)** with the understanding also.

4. Eph. 5:19

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (óde) and **making melody (psallontes)** in your heart to the Lord;

5. James 5:13

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him **sing psalms (psalleto)**.

So the first part of the command is to sing psalms, either from the book of psalms, or other songs of praise to God; an instrument may be used. The singing should come from the heart and should be done with one's whole heart towards God.

II. Hymns

Definition – noun: a hymn, sacred song, song of praise to God. Greek: **hymnos - 5215**

(from *hydeō*, "to celebrate") – a song that gives honor, praise, or thanksgiving.

It occurs twice in the NT together with the word "psalms" (see above), pointing to well-known songs of praise to God that became established hymns for the early Christians. It is a song which celebrates God gives praises and thanks to him.

1. Eph. 5:19

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and **hymns (hymnos)** and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

2. Col.3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and **hymns (hymnos)** and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Definition - verbform:

The verb form **ὑμνέω (hymneo)**, occurs 4 times and is translated "to sing hymns or praises".

1. ^{KJV} Matthew 26:30

And when they had **sung an hymn (hymneo - 5214)**, they went out into the mount of Olives.

2. Mk. 14:26 – same wording as in Mat. 26:30

Many commentaries agree that this singing of an hymn refers to the so called "Full Hallel" which Jesus has probably sung with his disciples before going to the garden of Gethsemane. It is also called the "Egyptian Hallel" because it reminds of the Passover feast of the Israelites. It consists of the psalms 113-118 and psalm 136 and is sung in the Jewish families at all the Jewish feasts (compare Thayers definition no. 2).

“The term “hallel” always refers to praise of an ecstatic nature. In the Temple, such psalms were usually accompanied by musical instruments and dancing. They express great joy which spreads throughout the universe.” (“The Rabbinical Assembly”)

„Das → Pessachfest kann als der genuine Ort dieser Psalmengruppe gelten. Die Verwendung von Ps 113-118 an Pessach ist bereits in der rabbinischen Literatur breit belegt. Nach der Schule Hillels wird das „Ägyptische Hallel“ während der häuslichen Feier am Pessachabend in zwei Teilen gebetet: Ps 113 / Ps 114 und Ps 115-118“ (Bibellexikon – www.Bibelwissenschaft.de) I.e.: „The Passover feast may be taken as the genuine place of this group of psalms. The use of Psalms 113-118 at the Passover has already been documented in Rabbinical literature. According to the school of Hillel the “Egyptian Hallel” is prayed in two parts during the celebration at home at the Passover evening: Ps 113/Ps 114 and Ps 115-118 (own translation).

“*Hallel* is recited in two forms: (a) The “full” *Hallel*, consisting of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted in the synagogue on *Sukkot, *Hanukkah, the first day of *Passover (the first two days in the Diaspora), ...” (Encyclopedia Judaica)

“Talmudic discussion of the liturgical use of Psalms 113-118 focuses on how the Psalms incorporate gratitude for God's past acts of salvation and confidence in God's future redemption of Israel.” (www.MyJewishLearning.com)

^{KJV} **Matth. 26:30:**

And when they had sung a hymn (**hymneo**), they went out into the mount of Olives. (King James Bible)

^{MRD} **Matth. 26:30:**

And they **sang praises** (**hymneo**), and went forth to the mount of Olives. (Peshitta – James Murdock Translation 1852)

^{NJB} **Matth. 26:30:**

After the **psalms had been sung** (**hymneo**) they left for the Mount of Olives. (The New Jerusalem Bible)

Mark 14:26

After **singing the Hallel** (**hymneo**), they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Complete Jewish Bible (CJB))

Matth. 26:30:

And **having sung the Hallel** (**hymneo**), they went out to the Har Ha Zeytim. (Orthodox Jewish Bible)

The last four translations confirm the meaning of “hymns or singing hymns” being songs or singing of praises, or even singing the above-mentioned psalms.

Jesus and the disciples must have known these songs, “hymns”, as they were singing them together thus acting according to the tradition.

And in the above verses it has a special meaning because they were sung immediately before Jesus' crucial time of suffering, him becoming our Passover lamb and by his sacrifice making available the redemption of mankind. I believe that the singing has taken some time, it was not a quick thing to get through with but rather a lengthy and important part of their being together and of their ritual. It was a very emotional time in which the singing together - probably Psalms 113-118 – strengthened and encouraged Jesus and his disciples for the upcoming events.

3. Acts 16:25

^{KJV} **Acts 16:25**

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and **sang praises (hymneo)** unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

^{MRD} **Acts 16:25**

And at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **glorifying (hymneo)** God: and the prisoners heard them.

^{NAS} **Acts 16:25**

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing hymns of praise (hymneo)** to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; (New American Standard Bible with Codes 1977)

“Sang praises”, glorifying” and “singing hymns of praise” are translated from the same Greek word ὑμνέω (**hymneo**).

The verse describes exactly what Paul and Silas were doing while being imprisoned in Philippi: they sang praises to God, they were glorifying him. They both must have known the songs they were singing, either being songs of praise taken from the psalms or other well-known hymns which were sung in the first century church. And they sang together thus also being edified themselves, strengthened and being encouraged.

4. The last usage is in **Hebr. 2:12**, quoting from the well-known Messianic Psalm 22, where Jesus would sing praises to his Father.

^{KJV} **Hebrews 2:12**

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church **will I sing praise (hymneo)** unto thee.

The glory of the Father was what Christ saw in his heart; he was set upon it, he gave his life for it, and he would have his people to join with him in it.

So, we can see that the hymns were also well-known songs, either referring to the book of Psalms or other well-known songs. They were sung in worship to celebrate God for his glory upon his people, or privately even in the midst of persecution in order to look only to God, to focus on his goodness and kindness and willingness to deliver.

III. Spiritual songs

Definition – noun:

a song, lay, ode; in the Scriptures a song in praise of God or Christ (Thayer’s)

ōdē – a song (***odē* - 5603**) is used in the NT of *spontaneous, impromptu (unrehearsed)* melodies of praise – not merely sung about (for) God but to God from a Spirit-filled heart. Spirit-inspired songs minister to God and exhort others, giving testimony about the living God to other worshipers. (HELPS Word-Studies)

Definition - verb form:

ᾶδω - ado (**ᾠδῶ - aeido**); ᾶδοντες (adontes); common in Greek of every period; in the Sept. for שׁוּר; **to sing, chant**;

- intransitive: to the praise of anyone (Judith 16:1 (2)), Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16 (in both passages of the lyrical emotion of a devout and grateful soul).
- transitive: Revelation 5:9; Revelation 14:3; Revelation 15:3

singing (adontes - 103)

The words “spiritual songs” (óde) are used in Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16 and 3 times in the book of Revelation; the verb form is used in Col. 3:16 also 3 times in Revelation.

1. Eph. 5:19:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual **songs (óde)** and making melody (psallontes) in your heart to the Lord;

2. Col. 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual **songs (óde)**, **singing (adontes)** with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The song should be “spiritual”, i.e. coming from the spirit, or being spirit-filled. The other usages are in the book of Revelation.

3. ^{KJV} Revelation 5:9

And they **sung** (**ᾶδουσιν - adosin**) a new **song (ōdē)**, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

4. ^{KJV} Revelation 14:3

And they **sung** (**ᾶδουσιν - adosin**) as it were a new **song (óde)** before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that **song (ōdē)** but the hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

5. ^{KJV} Revelation 15:3

And they **sing** (**ᾶδουσιν - adosin**) the **song (ōdē)** of Moses the servant of God, and the **song (ōdē)** of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints.

The song of Moses is a song of thanksgiving and praise, such as he taught the Hebrew people to sing after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (See Exodus 15.). The redeemed in the book of Revelation should not sing that identical song, but while Moses taught the people to celebrate their deliverance with an appropriate hymn of praise, the redeemed would celebrate their delivery and redemption in a similar manner with a special song.

So, the (spiritual) song (ode) may contain a greater variety of matter, doctrinal, prophetic, historical, etc. but they are like the psalms and hymns songs of praise and in honor to a great and wonderful God who always has delivered and will deliver.

All three words may at times be used interchangeably and mean the same thing. The important point is that the Christian church is obliged to sing, it is an ordinance for her to make melody with all her heart with songs of praise to their wonderful God. Instruments may be used also. It is also a joyous thing.

It has the same importance as all the other spiritual matters being evident in a church assembly. It is one of the spiritual matters the church is supposed to employ in their services.

When we think of the OT singing and music at the temple which David instituted and also the Jewish tradition of chanting psalms, we can see that singing and making music has a long tradition and is not abolished at any time but has kept its great importance for playing a big part in worship and church assemblies.

Nothing is said concerning the specific kind of melody, rhythm or harmony which was used or should be used. But it is of minor importance for our fellowships today.

The different chanting of Jewish communities nowadays may give a hint of how it might have sounded at Jesus' and the first century church's time. It was singing and music where the whole heart, mind and soul and body were involved, sometimes accompanied with dancing.

To sum up the study: I feel a great importance of having singing and music, also new songs and new music as inspired by the spirit that lives within us, in our fellowships, being an ordinance and command by God. Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 show that it is a spiritual matter being very important for the growth and nurture of the body of Christ which should not be neglected. It is one part of letting the word of God dwell in us richly.

NIB Colossians 3:16

Let the word of (concerning) Christ dwell in (among) you richly as you (1) teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you (2) sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts (with your heart) to God. (own brackets)

The verse is talking about the word of God, which is to dwell richly in the church, among the believers, and this dwelling in richness manifests itself by

- teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
- singing psalms, hymns and songs from the spirit with our heart

Claus Kratzenberg, Villip, Germany, 3.8.17