

# Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

## Introduction:

As far back as we have a record of God's people, we see that singing has always been an essential part of how they expressed their love and devotion for God. As God was leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses and the children of Israel sang a song to the Lord saying, "I will sing unto Jehovah for He is exalted on high!" In Psalm 33 we are encouraged, "Sing joyfully to the Lord you righteous ones; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him."

Most of us are familiar with the fact that the psalms were/are songs written in poetic form. We have 150 of them collected in the book of Psalms in the OT. But it is believed other scriptures were written as songs initially or were adapted to be sung as hymns by the early Christians.

- I. Singing is what God's people do!
  - A. Exodus 15
  - B. Deuteronomy 31:19-22, 30
  - C. Judges 5
  - D. 1 Chronicles 6:32
  - E. Psalms
    1. Feast psalms – 113-118
    2. Psalms of Ascent – 120-134
- II. Singing in the New Testament
  - A. Matthew 26:30
    1. On this occasion Jesus and his apostles would have been singing psalms 113-118 as a part of the Passover meal observance.
  - B. Acts 16:25
    1. Paul and Silas were "praying and singing hymns" (ESV)
  - C. Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16
    2. Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
    3. A means of addressing, teaching and admonishing one another
    4. An expression of thanksgiving to God
    5. A result of being filled with the Spirit; the word of Christ richly indwelling us
- III. Early Christian Hymns
  - A. Besides the psalms, about 35 passages have been identified as early Christian hymns in the New Testament.
  - B. It is debated / unknown if these were hymns first, then incorporated into the sacred text by the NT writers, or if they were hymns derived from the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James or Jude.
  - C. There are some agreed upon general characteristics, however:
    1. Verbal parallels – the repeated use of the same noun, verb, or preposition
    2. Conceptual parallels – one idea or concept set over against another
    3. Chiastic structure
    4. Strophic arrangement
      - a. From the Greek "turn, or turning"
      - b. A way of dividing poems and songs into stanzas
- IV. Three such passages
  - A. Colossians 1:15-20
    1. Conceptual parallels:

- a. Jesus' creative power (old creation)
  - b. Jesus' redeeming power (new creation)
- 2. F.F. Bruce sees a strophic arrangement:
  - a. Vss. 15-16
  - b. Vss. 17-18a – transitional link
  - c. Vss. 18b-20
- B. Philippians 2:6-11 – the Christ Hymn or Kenosis Hymn
  - 1. Jesus Christ is Lord
    - a. Word of emphasis placed first in the Greek
  - 2. Chiastic structure
    - A. Jesus Christ is God (5-6a)
      - B. He descended, became subservient (6b-7)
        - C. He died humbly, obediently (v.8)
      - B.' He ascended, became superior (v.9)
        - A.' Jesus Christ acknowledged as God (v.10-11)
- C. Ephesians 1:3-14 – Hymn of Grace
  - 1. 1:3-6 – The work of the Father
  - 2. 1:7-12 – The work of the Son
  - 3. 1:13-14 – The work of the Spirit

V. The point?

- A. Glorifying God by singing praises should be a natural part of who we are
  - 1. James 5:13
  - 2. Colossians 3:16
- B. We need to learn to focus on the words and the message of what we sing
  - 1. Recognize the scripture and passage references in the songs from our hymnals
  - 2. Concentrate on following the thought pattern and development through the hymn
  - 3. Consider a parody video posted by Park Community Church in Chicago – what it means to worship God in song: A worship leader in the video starts off with a song that makes liberal use of imagery, mimicking the way the same tired metaphors and cliché's are written into many modern hymns. In the video a visitor to the service is confused by the lyrics and at one point asked her friend, "What does it mean to be drowned in grace?" "To be drowned in grace? Don't think about it, just sing," the friend replied.
- C. We need to be more judicious in the songs we choose to sing in our worship.
  - 1. Many contemporary songs used as hymns today are couched in the terms of romantic infatuation rather than religious devotion. Songs like that have a superficial appeal, but they're not going to provoke spiritual growth or a closer walk with God. They meet us where we are rather than taking us where we ought to be. It's the spiritual equivalent of eating cotton candy—enjoyable, but hardly nourishing.
- D. Blending our voices together and offering up a sacrifice of praise to God (Heb. 13:15) pleases Him and He ought always be enthroned upon the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3).