

# Book of Psalms for Singing

Logan West

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## Book of Psalms for Singing

This psalter still has and will always have a solid place in my heart: I was first introduced to the singing of psalms using this psalter and many of the words will remain indelibly engraved in my mind. This psalter is available for purchase from [Crown & Covenant Publications](#).

### Background

The RPCNA originally moved from the 1650 Scottish Metrical Version to a version in 1889 that was a relatively minor update of the convoluted language and was not very widely accepted in the denomination. About 1893 the RPCNA sent delegates to join the work on the “Unified Psalter”, which eventually became “The Psalter” of 1912. After working on the committee for over 10 years, the RPCNA decided it had gone a direction they could not continue in and decided to publish their own psalter, using earlier, approved versions of psalms from the unified committee’s earlier work. This was published in 1911 and was a large success among the congregations, the main complaint being a complexity of music. Synod commissioned a revision of the music portion of the psalms in 1919 and another in 1929. Both revisions changed little to the psalter, with the latter adding a couple of additional selections but not changing much of the prior versions. There was another revision in 1950 that also changed little but more than the previous revisions did.

Then in 1973 a more thorough revision gave this, the *Book of Psalms for Singing* and placed our psalter in the tradition of including the text in between the lines of music. Older language was retained but great effort was made to render it easy and fluid to sing.

It comes in a red, hardbound version that is fairly durable and pleasant to use, and about as large as most hymnals due to the many selections.

## Translation

The psalter preface does not say much in the way of translation. In some ways I get the impression that this psalter departed a little from the Hebrew, for whatever reason I do not know. Particularly I would note Psalm 110 where the line “in battle with thine enemies be thou the conqueror” is particularly puzzling to me. Other lines gave me the impression that the biblical text was implying something (like commands to sing psalms) that were not there in the original. Despite these few things, it was still very close to the original and was helpful for getting God’s word into my heart and mind.

## Music

As a beginning Psalm singer (but a long-time hymn singer) I was very happy to find many hymn tunes in the psalter. People have put together lists of well-known tunes that were very helpful to me when I was learning.

Most of the tunes are relatively easy to sing and they often fit the words very well. Particularly I recall 32C being especially compelling to me when I was first introduced. The tunes suffer at times from a pitch that I think it just a little too high for most congregations and from a few complex tunes but generally it was very well done and well-suited to *a capella* singing.

The psalter also gave a wide variety of selections, sometimes having the entirety of the psalm in multiple meters.

The entirety of the music is available in MIDI format from [psalter.org](http://psalter.org).

## Conclusion

One feature of this psalter that I found very likeable is that even though the psalms are divided up (usually no more than six stanzas to a page and tune), they are also set in the same meter across all the portions so that the entire psalm may be sung to a particular tune. Unfortunately in practice many congregations seemingly just stuck with the portion that was on the page and rarely sang multiple portions to get the entire psalm. However, this is not a fault of the psalter.

In general this was a very nice psalter and one which introduced many Christians to psalm singing. It still leaves a very strong impression on me and I am grateful that it was published. It is a little dated though, and I would have a hard time recommending this as a primary psalter with several other good options available. Generally I would recommend either

*Sing Psalms* or the RPCNA's 2009 *Book of Psalms for Worship* if one is looking for a modern psalter.