

Sing Psalms

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The entirety of the text is available in PDF or Word format from [here](#). I really appreciate them making it available for people to use freely. It is available for purchase from the above website, from [Crown & Covenant](#), or from Banner of Truth, at varying prices.

Background

The Free Church of Scotland used the 1650 Scottish Psalter (SMV) for years but somewhere in the 1980s or 1990s a committee was put together to revise the psalter and put it into modern language. This was published in 1994.

Translation practices

The preface states

Because of the constraints imposed by the use of metre and rhyme, a metrical translation of the Psalms is inevitably freer than a prose translation. But what it may lose in terms of verbal correspondence it compensates for by rendering the Psalms into the metrical idiom to which English language readers are accustomed. A metrical translation is more than a paraphrase which renders in verse certain thoughts suggested by the original passage of Scripture. Sing Psalms is a metrical translation rather than a paraphrase in that every effort has been made to set out in verse what is to be found in the original text. At times compression of expression and also expansion have to be employed to adjust to the metrical format of the English version; this has been done in such a way as to steer a middle course between over-expansion of Scripture and undue omission. . . In its desire not to impose any specific interpretation on the Psalms, the Committee has been careful, in passages which in the light of the New Testament are interpreted as

messianic, to avoid a rendering which determines whether the passage is exclusively or typically messianic.

Formats

The psalter comes in two basic formats: with music, and words only. If you want music you have the choice to do either staff or sol-fa. These are split-leaf. If you choose words-only you have the choice between just a straight, words-only and another slightly more expensive version that additionally has the complete SMV in the back. Both are typeset very clearly and beautifully and are a pleasure to look at. The binding is rugged and should stand up to a good bit of use.

SMV version in the words-only version

This last version is *fantastic* as they have several means in the text of aiding in pronunciation and singing. This is not so much evident in the new version of the psalms, but in the SMV this is extremely helpful. The three aids are:

- Underlines: where the syllables or words should be on the same note. For example, in Psalm 1:3, “river” and “never” are both underlined. Similarly in Psalm 2:6 we have “appointed” “Zion” and “anointed”.
- Grave accents: where the syllables should be broken to be pronounced. As in Psalm 3:1 “increased” has no accent and is pronounced with two syllables, while in 3:5 there is “sustained`” which is pronounced as three syllables.
- Diaeresis marks: where a portion of a word should be held for two notes. Example in the second version of Psalm 6:1, where “indignation” has two dots over the “a”, indicating that this should be held for two notes. Incidentally, holding the note over the vowel in words like this has been my practice as opposed to trying to split up “tion” into two syllables.

So this version is very valuable just for the consistent notes. It is especially helpful when something occurs in the middle of a line instead of at the end so you do not run out of syllables at the end of the line. It could also be extremely helpful for congregational singing to keep everyone on track. My wife and I have found that different families develop different ways of dealing with the idiosyncrasies in the SMV and when we get together to sing with others it can cause a little bit of dissonance.

This psalter is valuable for this reason alone. Even if you never use the *Sing Psalms* updated language, the 1650 psalter is still there and in this format is the most useful and easy to use format I have seen yet, even without music. When singing the SMV, this will be my go-to psalter.

Staff note version

As with other split-leaf psalters, the main advantage is that you can have the music with the words (which is useful to someone like me who reads music) and yet one can also change the tune if there is a more familiar one or just to change it up and keep the psalm fresh in our understanding. Yet at the same time I really like having the words in verse form underneath. I recognize the useability of psalters that have words in line with the notes, but for understanding and following along I personally find the versified form more helpful and definitely more helpful for people who do not read music.

As an aside, we had a visitor to church a few weeks back that was not a Christian and was unfamiliar with singing. She said she got confused when we sang the first line of the first bar, then the first line of the second bar (instead of going to the second line of the first bar). Not a problem for someone who is used to singing from written music though.

The psalm portion of the splitleaf is arranged as you would expect and has the psalms numbered in the outer margin of each page for reference as you thumb through (so many pages would have a large “119” on the outer margin of both the recto and verso pages). Additionally the pages are numbered at the bottom in numerical order so one could say either “turn to Psalm 117” or “turn to page 329”.

The music portion is arranged by meter, so the first 100 tunes or so are all CM, the next section is CMD, then LM, etc. So while it might be awkward that psalm 2 might use the 200th tune (thus you are on a beginning page in the psalm half but later page in the music half), this makes it easier to change the tunes up by flipping a few pages to the right or left.

Each psalm is headed with two or three suggested tunes and sometimes tunes suggested for different portions of the psalm. I found this very helpful so that we can keep with a consistent tune if we choose and not haphazardly fit a different tune to Psalm 3 each time we use it. Each of the suggested tunes is fitted to the psalm’s tone to set the appropriate mood (no rousing marches to Psalm 137 please).

One big thing about the music arrangement is that it appears to be very easy to sing (it does not go too high or too low for the average singer). The

arrangements in *Sing Psalms* seem well-suited to singing harmonies.

Music

Many tunes are very familiar to users of other Psalters. St Peter is in the suggested list for Psalm 1, for example, and we found other tunes that we were familiar with from the *Book of Psalms for Singing*. There are many, many new tunes that are modern. I know this because the author's name has only one date next to their name and then a dash! I found a number of these tunes on a hymn website so it appears they were not necessarily composed for this psalter by members of the church. One of the things I was pleasantly surprised to find is that all of the tunes I looked at were very easy to follow. Some CM and CMD tunes are rather... tuneless? Boring? Hard to pick up on or hum? There have been some tunes I'll try to use for our family and even after 20 stanzas my wife still has not quite got the meandering tune. That can be a problem. These tunes I found I was able to sight-read and follow along after listening to the tune once or twice, even the ones in a minor key. That is a major success in my mind, even if it means not using more complex yet beautiful tunes.

My complaint with the tunes so far has been that there is not a lot of support for them. I found some on a hymn site and found [one site](#) that has some congregational singing on some of the psalms but not all of them by any means. So people who are not musical may have difficulty learning many of the tunes in there, which cuts out a large portion of the value.

Conclusions

I have compared by Bible to this psalter and found some instances where I thought they did a better job than the SMV and some instances where they were more loose. Both versions have some amount of padding and both capture the meaning, line-by-line and often word-by-word of what I have in my Bible and what I can glean by looking at Strong's Hebrew numbers. Both are far superior (by some criteria) to the RPCNA *Book of Psalms for Worship* and that does please me. After using the psalter for a while, I have found no problems with it yet. The text appears to be very close to the original and even places where it seems to differ slightly I find that the Hebrew allows for these nuances, or in some cases the psalter translators were closer to the Hebrew idiom than the prose translators.

I may have different expectations and criteria for a psalter than many others, but I find this one meets mine very well. I like the split-leaf format

for the ease of musical choice, I like having the entire psalm versified and placed together for the purposes of singing the entire psalm. I also really like the accuracy I have seen so far and yet the ease with which it can be sung. My wife and I both characterized it as much, much smoother than the SMV and also more easy to understand without so much convoluted grammar. And places where I have found it loose I may just be being picky, much like I can be picky with the SMV, but I am not sure. This demands more study. No version will be perfect but some will be better depending on the criteria and I have been thoroughly pleased with this psalter.