

PROFESSORS OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE

While studying and searching out this question I purposed to obtain a good cross-section of judgment from those considered experts in the field of language. Therefore, one of my projects was to write to approximately seventy-five professors who are teaching the Greek language in our leading universities. This list included at least one university in every state. Some states, having two or three outstanding universities such as California (Stanford, California at Berkely, University of California at Los Angeles, and Southern California), received more than one letter. Included also were several foreign universities.

The percentage of response was gratifying. The answers I received proved invaluable, highly interesting, and at times revealed some rather surprising facts. Among the many notes and conclusions of interest were the following:

A. By no means was I the first to write to Greek professors to obtain their judgment on the matter of psalmos. Many stated that they had answered a similar question many times.

B. A few expressed utter disgust that there should even be a controversy over the matter. One professor put it this way: "I think that you are in the wrong forest!" (Incidentally he did very graciously write a three page letter affirming the use of instruments in the word psalmos.)

C. Others were dubious of how much good would be accomplished even when the facts were presented. C. M. Dawson gave a typical statement of those who expressed this: "Frankly, I doubt whether such differences of opinion, as you refer to, can be settled rationally; too often emotion seems to take over reason." Let us hope that Professor Dawson of Yale University has not been correct in analyzing our attitudes. Mr. Dawson also concluded that the word psalmos meant a song with musical accompaniment.

D. Some of those who had answered the question many times before were not so much disgusted with the subject, but with the people who requested their expert judgment. After giving his judgment on the

question, his conclusion being in favor of instrumental accompaniment, one professor said that he had often received letters telling him how stupid he was. What a sad commentary on people's attitude when we see them react like this to expert judgment that differs from their traditional bias! This professor concluded that for people like that, the answer was to throw away all lexicons and dictionaries. This professor of a leading university was so thoroughly irked at the littleness of people who write to an authority for an opinion and then tell him that he is stupid, that he refuses to discuss the question anymore. He felt he didn't have the time nor the patience to deal with it. He quipped, "There are two things I hate to discuss, religion, and my lack of intelligence."

E. One most interesting and significant fact that I came upon through the source of these experts of Greek, was an explanation as to why instruments might have come into some disuse in the years following the establishment of the Church. One wrote this:

"Soon they were so persecuted that they were hiding in caves or in the catacombs secretly, and certainly as quietly as they could, for discovery might mean they would be fed to the lions. Practically all of Jerusalem Christians fled, or remained at the cost of their lives. Did these poor, persecuted people use musical instruments? No, of course not. But the word psalmos still meant exactly what it did before, and that it means today (see any Greek-English dictionary), but the use of instruments was impractical and almost impossible during that period."

Similarly, Arthur H. Moser writes,

"I can think of one reason why some early Christian groups may not have used music or musical instruments: they did not want to make so much 'noise' as to be discovered by unfriendly informers. Maybe this situation (when danger was over) made them think that, since music had been so sparingly used, religion instead of self-preservation had stopped the music."

Chamber's Encyclopedia makes a similar statement and then adds a further thought.

"If the Christian cult had immediately received official recognition -- it is probable that the Christians would have made use of at least some of the instrumental resources of the time, but being driven underground into the catacombs they were compelled to avoid drawing attention to their activities. When in the fourth century the ecclesiastical authorities were able to begin organizing the liturgy, the fathers of the church set their faces against the use of accom-

panying instruments on account of their pagan associations."²⁸

When we add to this the fact that some early Christians began to compare musical accompaniment with pagan singing and "worldliness" we have the answer as to why some early Christians stopped using the instrument. (Chrysostom strongly opposed instruments because they were "lifeless, demons, unnecessary, and used in heathen entertainments--cf. Hom. Ps. 149:2; Hom. Ps. 150. Clement said that such instruments as the pipe and flute were "more suitable to beasts than to men." He calls such music "licentious and mischievous." Cf. Instructor. These interesting comparisons are full of impressive emotional prejudice but demonstrate no scriptural backing and therefore would appeal only to one who is searching for a cause and not the truth.) Self-protection and preservation caused the instrument to be used sparingly; some abused its use causing it to be compared to pagan music; hence, some have concluded that conviction based on scripture had stopped the music!

We can take a lesson from this today: Let us not confuse scripturally based and backed doctrines or prohibitions with traditional practices or abstinences! One hundred years ago when this issue wrecked havoc with the restoration movement it was impractical for the smaller country churches in the South to have an organ. The bigger and richer "city" churches could afford them and got them. Church music came to be closely connected with the liturgical and formalistic atmosphere of the larger and more modernistic city churches.

You and I become so involved in the issue and the arguments concerning it in our day that it is hard for us to see the emotion-packed sectional disputes, urban-rural differences and the cultural influences of early restoration history which a century ago spawned this controversy over the instrument and has carried it down to our day.*

(F) One final point that was quite interesting and significant was the ratio of letters endorsing instrumental accompaniment in the words psallo and psalmos as opposed to those who insisted that it was excluded. I received approximately fifty responses to the letters which I wrote to various professors of Greek. Their replies were divided into three divisions. The first group said that instrumental accompaniment was definitely included in the word. The second group included those who

²⁸Chamber's Encyclopedia; George Newnes Limited, London, England; 1963; Col. 3; p. 564.

* For a fuller discussion of cultural influences, see article in the Appendix I.

said: 1. The words meant either accompanied or unaccompanied. 2. They didn't know. The third group said that the words meant unaccompanied. What was the ratio? Those who said that the words meant unaccompanied numbered THREE. Of those three, one was from the University of Texas and another from Abilene Christian College, Abilene, Texas.

The question that was asked is the following:

Dear Sir:

I am seeking your expert judgment. In the First Century, did the Greek word Psallo and it's noun form Psalmos mean "to sing only," or did they mean to sing with musical accompaniment? What, in your opinion, is it's meaning in Ephesians 5:19?

I have reproduced about twenty of these letters. Preceding them I have given each one a number and have taken a summary statement from them.

Example 31

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK STATE COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS
ALBANY

Mar. 3, 1962

Mr. Thomas Burgess
8624 N.E. Ellison
Portland 20, Oregon

Dear Mr. Burgess,

Your letter was somewhat delayed in reaching me, and partly owing to illness this summer has been further delayed. I am very sorry. Yes, I think ψάλλω nearly always means to sing to the accompaniment of a harp and the noun means often "a song sung to a stringed instrument, a psalm" as the Fiddell and Scott Greek dictionary says. In

Ephesians 5:19 I think it means psalms accompanied by the harp" all in one word. "the psalms that is" and then St. Paul adds: "also other hymns and spiritual poems. The ψάλλω incidentally usually implies musical accompaniment also. It's a lovely passage and I'm so glad you called my attention to it.

Sincerely,

Mary S. Loggus

New York State College for Teachers

"In Ephesians 5:19 I think it means 'psalms accompanied by the harp,' all in one word."

Example 32

Professor of Greek
University of Florida

Dear Sir,

I am seeking your expert judgment. Does the Greek word ψάλλω mean to sing with musical accompaniment or does it mean to sing without musical accompaniment?

I am specially interested in the word as found in Ephesians 5:19.

I am intensely interested in your reply. Thank you kindly for your time.

Sincerely,

Bob Mather

Bob Mather

Psalm means first to play a stringed instrument
from "to pluck"
then later, to sing to the accompaniment
of a stringed instrument?
V. Arndt.

University of Florida

"Psalmos meant first to play on a stringed instrument from 'to pluck' then later, to sing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument."

Example 33

I am intensely interested in your reply. Thank you

kindly for your time.

Sincerely,
Bob Mather
Bob Mather

I can only refer you to the standard dictionaries. Liddell-Scott-Jones say "song sung to the harp" citing your passage. Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the N T (Chicago 1957) say the same "to sing to the accompaniment of the harp." — Aubrey Diller

University of Indiana

"I can only refer you to the standard dictionaries. Liddell-Scott-Jones say 'song sung to the harp,' citing your passage. Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago, 1957) say the same 'to sing to the accompaniment of a harp.'"

I am intensely interested in your reply. Thank you
kindly for your time.

Sincerely,
Bob Mather
Bob Mather.

As nearly as I can make out *psalmos* means
singing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. In ancient
times the root *psal* meant to pluck the strings of an instru-
ment. In the N T it is possible the word refers only to the
psalms of David but I am inclined to think it means they
were sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.
Mr. Rich Paulantou

University of Hawaii

"As nearly as I can make out *psalmos* means singing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument."

Example 35

Thank you very kindly for your time.

Sincerely,
Tom Burgess
Tom Burgess

Basically, the term *psalmos* seems to strike an instrument.
It does, however, admit of singing as well. My feeling
is that the singing was accompanied. In the passage
described, then, it should mean accompanying themselves
with psalms, hymns and songs. However, I am not
a theologian, and theologians do not always approve
of my scriptural interpretation. Nor do I of theirs.

Sincerely,
Selwyn L. Casey

University of Connecticut

"Basically, the term psallo means to strike an instrument. It does, however, admit of singing as well. My feeling is that the singing was accompanied."

Example 36

Dear Mr. Burgess

Please forgive this delay in reply. Your question became buried in a pile of papers on my desk. In trying to clear the year's business after many absences from my office, I have found this.

The answer to your question is that it meant to sing with musical accompaniment.

Sincerely,
Austin M. Leshbrook
Univ. of Kansas

University of Kansas

"The answer to your question is that it meant to sing with musical accompaniment."

Example 37

UNIVERSITY OF
GRAND

NORTH DAKOTA
FORKS



DEPARTMENT OF MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

Dear Sir:

$\gamma\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{o}\varsigma$ is derived from the verb $\gamma\alpha\lambda\lambda\omega$ which means "to pluck," "to pull" (as strings from a harp) and came to mean "to play" especially a stringed instrument.

To me it appears that it retains its original meaning in the passage you have sent to me. The only difficulty lies in the attempt to translate the passage literally; but if you think long enough you will find yourself that it cannot mean a singing without music.

Feel free to write to me

Sincerely,
A. Palamides

SEVENTY-FIFTH

ANNIVERSARY

University of North Dakota

"Psalmos is derived from the verb psallo which means 'to pluck' 'to pull' (as strings from a harp) and came to mean 'to play' especially a stringed instrument. To me it appears that it retains its original meaning in the passage you have sent to me. The only difficulty lies in the attempt to translate literally; but if you think long enough you will find yourself that it cannot mean a singing without music."

Example 38

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
MADISON 6

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
WASCOM HALL

December 9, 1960

Mr. Bob Mather
3930 s.e. 71
Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. Mather:

The word ψαλμός means music with an accompaniment of a stringed instrument plucked with the fingers, no plectrum being used. The two words come from the verb ψάλλω whose original meaning is "to pluck". For further information on these words see the usual lexicons viz. Liddle, Scott, Jones, and Arndt and Gingrich's translation of Bauer.

Sincerely yours,

Herbert M. Howe

Herbert M. Howe
Chairman

b

University of Wisconsin

"The word psalmos means music with an accompaniment of a stringed instrument plucked with the fingers, no plectrum being used."

Example 39

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
BURLINGTON, VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
WATERMAN BUILDING

6 Dec 60

Dear Mrs. Mather:

There is no question in my mind that ψαλμοί, when it refers to singing, indicates singing with musical accompaniment.

ψάλλω means "to pluck", both in the Septuagint and in classical authors from Hesychius on [A. refers to a "bow-string" in his Persae]. A ψαλμός is therefore a "twitching" or "strawging" (cf. Euripides, Ion, 173) or the sound of the cithara or harp (cf. Pindar, Frag. 125²; Aristophanes, Frogs; also found in Greek inscriptions).

Look up ψαλμοί in Liddell-Scott-Jones or in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: I believe you will quickly discover that there is no support at all for the idea that ψαλμοί were sung a capella, and that there is every indication that they were songs with stringed accompaniment.

My impression is (though I can't prove it) that ὕμνοι were a capella, and that ᾠδαί were either with or without accompaniment. But there seems no doubt about ψαλμοί.

Sincerely,

John Kent
Chairman

University of Vermont

"There is no question in my mind that psalmos, when it refers to singing, indicates singing with musical accompaniment. . . . I believe that you will quickly discover that there is no support at all for the idea that psalmoi were sung a capella, and that there is every indication that they were songs with stringed accompaniment. My impression is (though I cannot prove it) that hymnoi were a capella, and that odai were either with or without accompaniment. But there seems no doubt about psalmoi."

Example 40

February 8
1962

Professor of Greek
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

Dear Sir:

Sincerely,
Tom Burgess
Tom Burgess

Dear Tom Burgess -

My Liddell-Scott Gk. Dictionary for ψάλλω gives
1) to pluck, pull, twitch, 2) mostly of stringed instruments,
to play a stringed instrument, later to sing to a
harp, as in LXX Ps. 7, 18, 9. 12, etc.

ψαλλός - later, a psalm, a song sung to the
harp: LXX 2 Ki. 23. 1, your passage from Ephesians.
So I'd translate the latter "speaking to them-
selves with psalms and hymns and songs". As
to answer your question, in a musical sense ψάλλω
would mean to sing to a harp accompaniment, ψαλλός
such a song, i.e., it would imply a harp accompaniment.

University of Virginia

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"... to answer your question in a musical sense psallo would mean 'to sing to a harp accompaniment.' psalmos such a song, i.e., it would imply a harp accompaniment."

Example 41

February 8
1962

Professor of Greek
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

Dear Sir:

I am seeking your expert judgment. In the first century

think you very kindly for your time.

According to Liddell and Scott, the verb ψάλλω originally meant, to pluck,
to play a stringed instrument with the fingers.
Later, and in the first century, it acquired
the meaning to sing to a harp or to sing
with a stringed accompaniment.

ψαλλός was originally used to
designate the sound of plucked strings,
a travelling later it meant a song
accompanied by a stringed instrument,
always plucked, never bowed.

ψαλλός was originally an ode or song
to gods or heroes, sung on festive
occasions, with or without accompaniment.
ὕμνος was simply the general word
for song.

W. Easter
Asst. Prof. of Greek

University of Kentucky

73

"According to Liddell and Scott, the verb psallo originally meant, to pluck, to play a stringed instrument with the fingers. Later, and in the first century, it acquired the meaning to sing to a harp, or to sing with a stringed accompaniment. Psalmos was originally used to designate the sound of plucked strings, a twanging. Later it meant a song accompanied by a stringed instrument, always plucked, never bowed."

Example 42

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES
JOAQUÍN ORTEGA HALL - ALBUQUERQUE

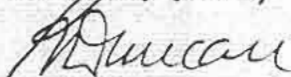
February 15, 1962

Mr. Tom Burgess
8624 N. E. Glisan
Portland 20, Oregon

Dear Mr. Burgess:

I have passed your letter of February 8th to Dr. Donald A. McKenzie who typed out the definitions of the words you inquired about. I suppose that he did not wish to become involved in a theological discussion of the Biblical text you quote.

Sincerely yours,


R. M. Duncan
Chairman

RMD;aj
Enc. (1)

ψαλλω. Classical: to pluck, to play a string instrument;
New Test.- to sing to a harp.

ψαλλοῖς = the twanging with the fingers (of a bow string);
mostly used of musical strings; New Test. a song
sung to the accompaniment of the harp.

University of New Mexico

"Classical: to pluck, to play a stringed instrument; New Testa-
ment--to sing to a harp. Psalmos--classical: the twanging with the fingers (of a bow string); mostly used of musical strings; New Testament--a song sung to the accompaniment of the harp."

Example 43

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
ATHENS, GEORGIA

November 29, 1960


Mr. Bob Mather
3930 S. E. 71
Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. Mather:

I have your letter of 21 November asking about the meaning of ψαλλοῖς. It would seem that this word always suggests a musical accompaniment, that is specifically of the harp. The root of this word occurs in the Greek verb ψαλλω, which means to pluck, pull, twitch (anything). From this basic root many words are derived referring to playing a stringed instrument. The passage in Ephesians would certainly imply the songs to be sung to the accompaniment of a harp.

It was good to hear from you, and if I can be of any further help, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,


James W. Alexander
Head, Classics Department

"It would seem that this word always suggests a musical accompaniment, that is, specifically of the harp.... The passage in Ephesians would certainly imply the songs to be sung to the accompaniment of a harp."

Example 44

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
UNIVERSITY, MISSISSIPPI

Department of Classics

19 February, 1962

Mr. Tom Burgess
8624 N.E. Glisan
Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. Burgess:

Your letter has been given to me by the Modern Languages Department here, and I will do my best to give a satisfactory answer. In classical Greek the primary meaning of ψάλλω is "pluck" or "twang", and its secondary meaning is "play a stringed instrument". This secondary meaning was later extended to "sing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument", but I cannot offhand recall its being used with the meaning "sing" alone. Similarly, ψαλμοί means at first "music of a stringed instrument", later "song accompanied by a stringed instrument".

I am not an expert in New Testament Greek, but I have consulted Dr. Allen Cabaniss, head of the history department here and a well-known New Testament scholar. He is of the opinion that ψαλμοί in the passage you quote should be translated "Psalms", meaning those in the Old Testament canon, and that ψάλλω and ψαλμοί in the New Testament mean "sing Psalms" and "Psalms" respectively, and should be so translated.

I hope this answers your question satisfactorily.

Sincerely yours,
Lucy Turnbull
(Dr.) Lucy Turnbull

University of Mississippi

"...In Classical Greek the primary meaning of psallo is 'pluck' or 'twang', and its secondary meaning is 'play a stringed instrument.' This secondary meaning was later extended to 'sing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument', but I cannot off hand recall its being used with the meaning 'sing alone'. Similarly, psalmos means at first 'music' of a stringed instrument', later 'song accompanied by a stringed instrument'."

Example 45

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

138 Lincoln Hall
Urbana, Illinois
February 19, 1962

Mr. Tom Burgess
8624 NE Glisan St.
Portland 20, Oregon

Dear Mr. Burgess,

Our best authority on NT vocabulary, Arndt & Gingrich's revision (1957) of Bauer's Lexicon of the New Testament, states unequivocally that the verb psallō means 'sing (to the accompaniment of a harp), sing praise'. It renders the related noun psalmos merely as 'song of praise'. Presumably this implies the Hebraic practise of musical accompaniment to the voice, unless something in the context of the word forbids that interpretation. Though psalmois in Eph. 5:19 clearly refers to Christian songs of praise, as also in Cor. 14:26 and Col. 3:16, we know nothing about these Christian songs which forbids us to assume that they were performed with musical accompaniment. Therefore the word in Eph. 5:19 does mean "songs of praise (with musical accompaniment)".

Sincerely yours,
John L. Heller
John L. Heller, Head
Department of the Classics

University of Illinois

"Our best authority on New Testament vocabulary, Arndt, and Gingrich's revision (1957) of Bauer's Lexicon of the New Testament, states unequivocally that the verb psallo means 'sing (to the accompaniment of a harp), sing praise'... Presumably this implies the Hebraic

practices of musical accompaniment to the voice, unless something in the context of the word forbids that interpretation. Though psalmois in Ephesians 5:19 clearly refers to Christians' songs of praise, as also in I Corinthians 14:26 and Colossians 3:16, we know nothing about these Christian songs which forbids us to assume that they were performed with musical accompaniment. Therefore the word in Ephesians 5:19 does mean 'songs of praise (with musical accompaniment)'.

Example 46

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA 4

The College

CLASSICAL STUDIES

February 22, 1962

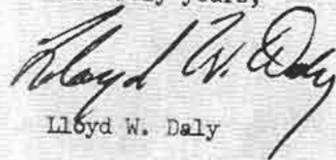
Mr. Tom Burgess
8624 N. E. Glisan
Portland 20, Oregon

Dear Mr. Burgess:

So far as I can see the verb ψάλλω was used only in the basic sense of "pluck a string" (either of a bow or musical instrument) in Greek literature. The meaning "sing to a harp" does not appear before the Septuagint. The same is true of the noun ψαλμός.

In Ephesians 5, 19 I should think ψαλμοῖς means just what we mean by psalms. By psalm I would understand a song whose verbal content was of religious or spiritual significance devised for accompaniment by a stringed instrument or of the same style as songs composed for such accompaniment.

Sincerely yours,


Lloyd W. Daly

LWD/l dm

University of Pennsylvania

"In Ephesians 5:19 I should think psalmois means just what we mean by psalms. By psalm I would understand a song whose verbal content was of religious significance devised for accompaniment by stringed instrument or of the same style as songs composed for such accompaniment."

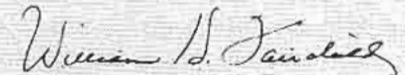
Example 47

Dear Mr. Burgess:

In the classical period, ψάλλω usually refers to the playing of a stringed instrument; in the New Testament, the verb means "to sing to a harp". ψαλμός generally means "the sound of the harp," and, in the New Testament, the noun means "a song sung to a stringed instrument." In the passage under consideration, the word retains the same meaning, in my opinion: to sing a song--accompanied by music. The distinction between the three words--each of which could refer to the same song--is as follows: ὕμνος is the generic term for a song, whereas ψαλμός and ὕμνος are specific. ὕμνος is a song dealing with the praise of God, and ψαλμός designates a song taking its general character from the Old Testament Psalms. The main idea in ψαλμοῖς, however, is that of musical accompaniment. If this passage perplexes you, see also KOA III 16, where the words occur together a second time.

Please accept my apology for the late acknowledgment of your inquiry. Perhaps you may find these comments relevant to, and compatible with your semantic inquiry.

Sincerely yours,


William D. Fairchild
Assistant Professor of Classics,
University of Alabama.

University of Alabama

"In the Classical period, psallo usually refers to the playing of a stringed instrument; in the New Testament, the verb means 'to sing to a harp.' Psalmos generally means 'the sound of the harp,' and, in the New Testament, the noun means 'a song sung to a stringed instrument.' In the passage under consideration, the word retains the same meaning, in my opinion: to sing a song accompanied by music. The distinction between the three words--each of which could refer to the same song--is as follows: ode is the generic term for a song, whereas psalmos and hymnos are specific. Hymnos is a song dealing with the praise of God, and psalmos designates a song taking its general character from Old Testament Psalms. The main idea in psalmos, however, is that of musical accompaniment."