

# Instrumental Music FAQ

## Introduction

Admittedly, those who today practice vocal, congregational singing are in the trivialized minority. Most people living today, who grew up attending worship services, did so listening to instrumental music as a part of worship. Others have come to expect it. Consequently, many questions are naturally raised when one first faces serious objections to its practice. It is the point of this article to address these frequently asked questions.

When instrumental music was introduced in modern Protestant denominations, less than 175 years ago, debate, controversy, and division soon followed. With so much debate, there are few new arguments raised today. Many of the following questions are "grandchildren" of the points used to justify instrumental music some 150, or 100 years ago.

The following questions are ordered according to their popularity. The first question is the most common and seems to be the crux of most peoples' justification for instrumental music. However, if you have a question that is not addressed here, please e-mail us or post a question on our forums.

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## Answers

But, the Bible nowhere commands NOT to use musical instruments?

This may be the most important question of this entire series, because it highlights the fundamental difference in thinking. Instrumental music is but one application of one's conviction on how to interpret the silence of the Scriptures. Like Luther, will we accept everything unless it is expressly forbidden, or like Zwingli, will we reject everything unless it is expressly authorized? However, this representation is a significant simplification of the

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latter's position. In truth, those who believe they are limited to "*speaking as the oracles of God*" (I Peter 4:11), recognize a distinction between generic and specific authority. The implication is that general authority may be provided by Scriptures on some directives, allowing man's judgment and other Biblical principles to determine the specific application.

For example, when Jesus commanded the apostles to "*go into all the world and preach the gospel*" (Mark 16:15-16), He did not specify **how** the apostles were to "*go*". They were left to their judgment and application of other Bible principles, if any, to determine the best way to go. The command generically necessitated some form of transportation, but it did not specify which form. Nowhere in the Bible does God offer any statement, uniform example, or basis for necessary inference that would specify a certain form. In contrast to this, God did specify singing to be used in worship (Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16). In the absence of a prohibitive command, are we at liberty to presume the freedom to deviate from God's specific command? This is the real question. Justification of a negative answer consists of at least three points.

First, consider what God has not forbidden, which we believe and know to be evil. The comprehensive listing of such deeds, practices, and attitudes would be an impossible task! If God intended that rule of interpretation, then the Bible would be unending, because man is constantly inventing new ways to sin. Where does the Bible condemn wife-beating? How about holy water, incense, or religious dancing? How many false religions have perverted the gospel, yet their perversions are not condemned specifically? This rule of interpretation is impractical even impossible to consistently follow; therefore, it is in great error. How can one honestly and consistently walk according to this principle without tolerating great wickedness, which he knows in his heart to be sinful?

Second, the Bible provides both principle and example proving this complete disregard for God's silence to be greatly flawed. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, specific commands are recorded instructing "not to add to or take away from" God's law (Deuteronomy 4:2; Joshua 1:7; Matthew 15:3,9; Galatians 1:8-9; I Peter 4:11; II John 9; Revelation 22:18-19).

How can one sanely presume upon the Creator of all things? Do we think that God is like a weak parent, who did not really think through the consequences of a command before issuing it? How can one disobey a positive command, just because a counter-negative command was not provided? Do we see God as a giant, cosmic teddy-bear, incapable of enforcing His warnings of punishment? It is this disrespectful, irreverent attitude of presumption that caused God to punish the disobedient, reminding His true followers, "*by those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy*". If we dare make such presumptions (Numbers 14:44-45; 15:30; II Peter 2:9-10), in spite of the above mentioned specific commands, the following examples should jar us to our senses:

- Nadab and Abihu - struck dead for offering incense in a way different from God's instruction (Leviticus 10:1-3; Exodus 30:9, 34-38)

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- **Saul** - rejected as king for disobeying God's command to wipe out the Amlekites so that he may sacrifice the best of their flocks to God (**I Samuel 15:22-23**)
- **Uzza** - struck dead for ignoring God's warning by stabilizing the ark of the covenant with his hand (**II Samuel 6:3-9**; **I Chronicles 15:2, 13, 15**)
- Uzziah - struck with leprosy because he tried to offer incense in the temple, which was the role of the Levite priests (**II Chronicles 26:16-21**)
- Galatian Christians - were spiritually lost because they introduced the requirement of circumcision into the gospel (**Galatians 5:1-4**)

These examples, among all the other examples from the Old Testament era, were given for our learning and admonition (**I Corinthians 10:11-12**; **Romans 15:4**). Will we heed their warning?

Notably, the writer of Hebrews uses the silence of the Scripture to **prove** that the Old Covenant was put away in Christ:

*For the priesthood being changed, **of necessity there is also a change of the law**. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, **of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood**. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest. (**Hebrews 7:12-15**)*

Not only was the silence of the Scriptures respected by first century Christians, the inspired writers of the Bible used it as a basis for deriving necessary, spiritual conclusions! Do we understand better how to interpret Scripture than God's inspired apostles and prophets? Moreover, even God Himself rebuked David for presuming to build a temple for the Lord. What argument did He use to suggest that David should have known better?

*Now it came to pass, when David was dwelling in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under tent curtains." ...*

*But it happened that night that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, "Go and tell My servant David, "Thus says the LORD: "You shall not build Me a house to dwell in. ... Wherever I have moved about with all Israel, **have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel**, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, '**Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?**' " " (**I Chronicles 17:1-6**)*

God used the silence of the Scriptures, even all of revelation, to argue against any justification for David presuming to build a temple for God. If God expected David to recognize and respect the silence of Scriptures, should we not do likewise?

Third, the Old Law similarly contained a command and example to sing (**Deuteronomy 31:19-32:52**), but it contained no prohibition to instrumental music. Consequently, the Israelites did not use instrumental music until the reign of David. Even then, a commandment from God was required to introduce it (**II Chronicles 29:25-28**). Their

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situation is parallel to our situation. If in the Old Testament, a specific command was required to authorize instrumental music, overriding the prior command to sing, why would a specific command not be required to override the original New Testament command to sing? If it was necessary for them, why is it not necessary for us?

What is the sum of these points? It is agreed that Scriptures *nowhere* command us *not* to use instrumental music. However, God did command us to sing ([Ephesians 5:18-20](#); [Colossians 3:16](#)). In light of God's warnings and examples against the sin of presumption, I dare not do otherwise than sing.

## Did not God's people use musical instruments in the Old Testament?

Yes. This is true. The Jews did use instrumental music to worship God. It was integral part of their worship ([I Chronicles 16:1-42](#)). Many Psalms reference instruments being a part of the worship service ([Psalm 147:1, 7](#); [149:1, 3, 5](#); [150:3-4](#)). However, the **Old Testament no longer has authoritative power to justify any practice** ([Romans 7:1-7](#); [Colossians 2:11-23](#); [Deuteronomy 18:15-19](#); [Matthew 17:1-5](#); [28:18-20](#)). In fact, if we turn to it for authority in one point, we become "*debtor to the whole law*" ([James 2:10-11](#); [Galatians 5:1-4](#)). We cannot expect to pick and choose the parts that are pleasing to us. We have to keep the whole thing or none of it. Therefore, if we decide to use the Old Testament to authorize instrumental music, then we must also enforce circumcision, sabbath rest, sacrifices, incense, Levitical priesthood, holy days, avoiding unclean food, spiritual dancing, and everything else that was commanded under the Old Law. Are you sure that you want to pick up the burden of the Old Law? As it has been commonly said, "what proves too much, proves little".

Also, please notice that instrumental music was associated with temple worship and the offering of sacrifices ([II Chronicles 29:20-30](#)). If we follow the Old Law, how can we use instrumental music without rebuilding the temple and offering sacrifices? Additionally, please notice that instrumental music under the Old Law was a "*commandment of the Lord*". If we use the Old Law for authority, then we must recognize the commandment of the Lord in this matter and **condemn** any who would not use instrumental music as rebels, because they are disobeying the commandment of the Lord. Are we willing to rebuild the temple, restore offering of sacrifices, and condemn those who do not participate? This is the way of the Old Law.

The entire New Testament book of Hebrews is a warning to those Hebrews would forsake their conversion to the gospel and return to the Old Law. In describing the Old Law, the writer of Hebrews states:

*It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- **concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances** imposed until the time of reformation. ([Hebrews 9:9-10](#))*

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The Old Law was filled with many laws and ordinances which compensated for the fleshly weakness of its adherents. In fact, God relaxed standards in the Old Law, compared to His original desire and standard for men:

*The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" And He answered and said to them,*

*"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

*They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them,*

*"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." ([Matthew 19:3-9](#))*

God's original standard was one man and one woman. However, He relaxed this standard for the Old Law, "because of the hardness of their hearts". We see Him doing this also for allowing multiple wives, or polygamy. God specifically warned the kings not to have multiple wives ([Deuteronomy 17:14-17](#)); however, we find that God tolerated David "multiplying wives" ([I Samuel 25:42-44](#); [II Samuel 5:13-16](#)).

As another example of this point, God's original desire was not to have a temple, or a stationary "house". However, David presumed to build one for God, because he enjoyed a house, and God did not have one ([I Chronicles 17:1-2](#)). Again, God ultimately acquiesced in allowing David to begin gathering the materials to build a temple, but He chided David for thinking in fleshly terms, presuming He needed a house ([I Chronicles 17:3-6](#) - see also [Psalm 50:1-23](#)).

As the final illustration of this point, instrumental music also was not part of God's original law to the Jews. God, through Moses, originally proscribed vocal singing ([Deuteronomy 31:19-22](#)). The examples of the Israelites' musical praise confirm the pattern of non-instrumental music ([Numbers 21:16-18](#); [Judges 5:1-31](#)). However, again under David's reign, instrumental music was introduced, but only at the commandment of the Lord ([II Chronicles 29:25-27](#)).

In the New Covenant, God once again established singing as the proscribed form of musical praise ([Ephesians 5:18-20](#); [Colossians 3:16](#)). Whenever we return to the forms of the Old Covenant, we are returning to the symbols and shadows of the true worship. We are returning to a more carnal form of worship that supports our weakness. We are abandoning Christ and returning to the "schoolmaster" or "little child leader", who brought us to the maturity of

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understanding the true nature of sin and Christ ([Romans 7:7, 13](#); [Galatians 3:19-25](#)). This is the very reason that the post-apostolic Christians provided for abandoning the praise of instrumental music (see quotes from Chrysostom, Aquinas, Catholic Encyclopedia, Calvin, Spurgeon, and Campbell).

In summary, the arguments based in the Old Testament examples and commands are rejected because:

- The Old Testament has been abolished, shattering its power to authorize any activity. We follow Christ and the New Covenant.
- The old form of music was a command; however, many want to use it optionally. Will any treat it as a command today?
- One cannot pick and choose the parts of the Old Testament that he likes best. We must adhere to some of the Old Law or none of it. Will any bind all of it today?
- The Old Law contained carnal ordinances, included because of the weakness of the fathers. God expects more today.

Does not the New Testament book of Revelation contain numerous references to instrumental music?

Yes. The New Testament book of Revelation does contain many references to instrumental music ([Revelation 5:8-9](#); [14:2-3](#); [15:2-3](#); [18:22](#)). However, it also contains references to incense ([Revelation 5:8](#); [8:3-4](#)), a dragon with a tail long enough to knock down the stars ([Revelation 12:1-4](#)), the number of the saved being limited to 144,000 Hebrew virgin males ([Revelation 7:4-8](#); [14:1-5](#)), beheaded saints crying out to God ([Revelation 6:9-11](#)), a 1000 year reign ([Revelation 20:4-6](#)), the throne of heaven ([Revelation 4:1-11](#)), a bottomless pit ([Revelation 9:1-11](#); [11:7](#); [17:8](#); [20:1-3](#)), John eating a book ([Revelation 10:8-11](#)), angels (Revelation 4; 8; ...), beasts of fantasy ([Revelation 4:6-9](#); [13:1-18](#)), water turning to blood ([Revelation 16:4-7](#)), the destruction of Babylon (Revelation 17-19), and the judgment of all souls ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

Revelation is an apocryphal book of visions, symbols, and prophecy. God did **not** intended for it to be understood *literally*. Rather, He intended us to understand it *figuratively*:

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- **things which must shortly take place**. And He sent and **signified it by His angel** to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this **prophecy**, and keep those things which are written in it; **for the time is near**. ([Revelation 1:1-3](#))*

Please notice that God "*signified it*". Throughout the book we find reference to both vision and prophecy ([Rev 1:3](#); [2:20](#); [9:17](#); [10:7](#); [10:11](#); [11:3](#); [11:6](#); [11:10](#); [11:18](#); [16:6](#); [16:13](#); [18:20](#); [18:24](#); [19:10](#); [19:20](#); [20:10](#); [22:6](#); [22:7](#); [22:9](#); [22:10](#); [22:18](#); [22:19](#)). To force a literal interpretation upon this book is both impractical and unintended.

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Revelation uses the same symbols that are found in the books of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and other Old Testament prophets; consequently, it is no surprise to find reference to things like altars of sacrifice, incense, and even instrumental music. The first century Jews were best suited to understanding the coded message that encouraged them to persevere. The Old Testament symbols warned them that their persecution would continue even to death; however, it also gave them hope that Rome would be judged by God and destroyed. The message is one of ultimate hope, in spite of sacrifice of mortal life. Ultimately, evil would be judged, and the saints would be victorious in Christ. Although interpreting every detail is difficult, one thing is clear: The concern was for immediate events, not events thousands of years away. Please notice how the book is closed:

*Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to **show His servants the things which must shortly take place**. Behold, **I am coming quickly!** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." ... And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is at hand**. ... And behold, **I am coming quickly** ... He who testifies to these things says, "**Surely I am coming quickly**." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! ([Revelation 22:6-21](#))*

From the beginning of the book to its end, the focus was on events "*which must shortly take place*". Although its specific application may have past in the destruction of Rome, the theme still holds true and provides encouragement for saints today.

Revelation's message is coded in figurative symbols. The book of Revelation has no more power to authorize literal instrumental music than it does to initiate a literal war with a physical dragon, capable of knocking down the one third of all stars with its tail. Just like the 1000 year reign, the bottomless pit, and John eating the little book, these symbols should not be understood or applied literally. The introduction to the book should never be forgotten when interpreting any passage from the book - "*things which must shortly take place ... and **signified it by His angel***". Therefore, this argument is dismissed, because it is rooted in prophetic figures that are symbolic and do not directly pertain to this earthly reality.

## [Are not musical instruments inherent with 'psalm' \(Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16\)?](#)

Fully answering this question involves some technical study of the ancient Greek language. However, it is not absolutely necessary. Before we dive into any technical discussion on this word, we should at least first answer the following question.

The Greek word for "psalm" ("*psalmos*", or verb form, "*psallo*") did indeed have the original, or radical meaning "to pluck", "to touch", "to strike", or "to twang". At one point during the evolving history of the Greek language it did connote plucking on a stringed instrument. If we **assume for the sake of argument** that it had this meaning

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during the time of writing of the New Testament, the question remains, "What instrument was to be plucked during the singing?". The instrument is not inherent in the word. The context must be examined to answer this question.

*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord**, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ([Ephesians 5:18-20](#))*

The instrument of choice is already specified by the Lord - the heart. The "heartstrings" are to be plucked. The graceful melody produced by this instrument of divine origin exceeds the appealing melody produced by any instrument of human origin. Since the instrument to be "plucked" has been specified, what authority do we have for changing it?

Again, by granting this argumentation, we can dismiss it by noting the absurd conclusions that necessarily follow. For one, we are commanded in these passages to sing in psalms. If we *momentarily assume* that instrumental music absolutely inheres in "*psalms*", then it necessarily follows we are disobeying God's commandment, if we do not employ instrumental music in our psalms. Since the command is given to all Christians, we can also conclude that all Christians must not only sing, but they all must also use some form of mechanical instrument, preferably stringed; otherwise, they sin by failing to use instruments in their psalms offered to God. Can anyone believe that all Christians must be able to play a stringed instrument to avoid transgressing God's command?

Another ridiculous conclusion is reached by observing that the instruments of music are limited to "psalms". No one would argue that "*hymns, and spiritual songs*" necessarily require musical accompaniment. This argument only applies to "*psalms*". Therefore, we must be careful not to use instruments of music with "*hymns, and spiritual songs*", and we must be sure that we absolutely use them with "psalms". Can anyone explain the difference between these otherwise seeming synonyms **and** consistently observe it in practice?

That being said, for the technically minded, let us consider **if** the praise of instrumental music is a valid definition for *psalms* at the time of writing the New Testament.

Kurfees's entire book on instrumental music is focused on addressing the charge that mechanical instruments are inherent with the usage of "psalm". Much of the following quotes are taken from his excellent book, which is highly recommended for those interested in a technical exploration of this question.

Common experience teaches us that languages evolve and change as long as they are in use. Examples could be multiplied from our own English language:



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2. The word **resent**. This word vividly illustrates the point before us. According to its Latin etymology, it literally means to exercise one's feelings in return for some kindly deed done by another; in other words, to express kindly feelings for favors received ... And so the only meaning which the word has to-day is "to be indignant at, to express or exhibit displeasure or indignation at." (Kurfees 32-33)

4. The word **candidate**. This familiar word is derived from a Latin word meaning **white**, and in the mouth of either Livy or Cicero a person running for public office was called a "candidate" (candidatus), not because the word denotes any such fact, but from the circumstance that such persons, according to Roman custom, were clothed in **white**. ... In popular usage to-day the average person, when speaking of a candidate for office, never thinks of the white toga worn by the ancient Romans. (Kurfees 33-34)

6. The word **prevent**. Just as we have seen in some other examples, so in "prevent" the idea in its Latin original prevailed for a time ... and in the Book of Common Prayer in the seventeenth century we find this petition to the Lord: "We pray The that thy grace may always **prevent** and follow us." ... King James Version, which was made in A.D. 1611, it is used in precisely this sense, which, with similar examples and facts, constituted one of the reasons for a Revision of the English of that version. It is used in that version in the sense in question in the following passages: "But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee," **Psa. 88: 13**. "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried," **Psa. 119: 147**. ... From the use of the word in these passages, the reader can easily see that some such term as "anticipate," "precede," or "go before" must be substituted for "prevent" in order to make good sense, because the latter, in present-day English, always means "to intercept; to hinder; to frustrate; to stop; to thwart" (Kurfees 35-36)

To make this point even clearer, some of the examples that Kurfees used ("carp", "timeserver", and "alderman") could not be used in this article, because they had either passed out of the common vernacular, or had changed meaning since his writing only 100 years ago!

This means we must pay special attention to the definition for *psallo* ensuring that any referenced definition includes some statement concerning its timing. For example, please consider the following misuses of Lexicons to "prove" that instrumental music is inherent in *psallo*:

*Editor Briney quoted it as follows:*

*What is the meaning of the term psallo? As applied to music, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, gives the following answer: "To play a stringed instrument, to play the harp; to sing to the music of the harp; to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praise of God in song." -- **Christian Companion**, February 15, 1905, p. 4.*

**He omitted the phrase, "In the New Testament."**

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... Now this omitted phrase, when left where Thayer placed it, marks the boundary line between what he gives as the classical meaning of **psallo**, on the one hand, and its New Testament meaning, on the other ... It is therefore unfortunate to omit the phrase when attempting to give Thayer's definition of **psallo** since this very material and significant distinction made by the author cannot otherwise be seen. (Kurfees 53-55)

In addition to this misuse, Kurfees dug up two other misrepresentations of Thayer's Lexicon: 1) Professor Lockhart, *Stark-Warlick Debate*, p.99; 2) Editor Homan, *The Christian Courier*, February 14, 1907, p.6. After considering these, we naturally ask, "What did Thayer actually say in his lexicon?" Here is Kurfees again:

*We first give Thayer's definition of **psallo** in full, which is as follows:*

*psallo (from psao, to rub, wipe; to handle, touch); a. "to pluck off, pull out"; etheiran, the hair. b. "to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang"; specifically xordev, "to touch" or "strike the chord, to twang the strings" of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate; and absolute "to play on a stringed instrument, to play the harp", etc.; Septuagint for niggen and much oftener for zimmer "to sing to the music of the harp"; **in the New Testament** "to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song."*

*That is his definition **verbatim** and in full, without giving his list of references to either the classic authors or the New Testament.*

First notice that the significance of the phrase, "*in the New Testament*". This indicates that the meaning had changed by the writing of the New Testament, such that the connotation of musical accompaniment had been lost. The meaning had changed to a metaphorical plucking of the human heart strings, which is singing. Additionally, these references exemplify the unfortunate choice of some to promote this false notion, even if it requires misrepresenting a scholarly source.

Kurfees ultimately quotes 17 different lexicons to ensure a broad sampling of the reputable, scholarly world. He condenses the observed **changes in psallo's definition over time** as follows:

1. **Radical meaning**, "To Touch", regardless of the particular object touched, the latter not inhering in the word.

2. **Meaning as applied in Greek literature:**

1. To pluck the hair.
2. To twang the bowstring.
3. To twitch the carpenter's line.
4. To touch the chords of a musical instrument, that is, to make instrumental music.

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5. *To touch the chords of the human heart, that is, to sing, to celebrate with hymns of praise.*

The radical, or root meaning of the word meant "to touch", and it was first used in reference to touching, or "plucking the hair". If one insists on going back to the original meaning of "*psallo*", because they hope it will authorize instrumental music, imagine their surprise to learn that it instead authorizes a congregation full of people singing, while stroking their beards and pulling at each other's hair!

Clearly, the question we must ask ourselves is, "What was the meaning of *psallo* at the writing of the New Testament?". As was already noted, Thayer, although occasionally misrepresented, limits the New Testament meaning to singing with no instrumental accompaniment. The separate lexicons of Liddell and Scott, Robinson, Bagster, Sophocles, and Thomas Sheldon Green also indicate similar definition during the writings of the Septuagint and New Testament (Kurfees 9-15). Among these names are the most prestigious names in New Testament Greek scholarship; therefore, we conclude that misinformants notwithstanding, closer study of the subject proves that instrumental music is not inherent, but it is ***rather excluded by the New Testament usage of psallo***. The arguments raised previously based on the text alone, additionally bolster this conclusion.

## References:

- Kurfees, M. C. **Instrumental Music in the Worship** or the **Greek Verb Psallo**. Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, TN. 1975. 1911, orig.

[Since we are commanded to sing "psalms" \(Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16\), and since psalms command us to use mechanical instruments, are we not therefore commanded to use the mechanical instrument? Will not the essential meaning of the psalm be lost without the commanded accompanying instruments?](#)

This question indicates 3 underlying requirements to satisfying the above commands to "*speak*", "*teach*", "*admonish*", and "*sing*" "*in psalms*":

1. **All** psalms of the Old Testament must be sung.
2. The **commands** of any psalm, which is sung, **must be executed** in that setting. In other words, singing those psalms makes them authoritative and binding upon us. We must do what they say, if we are to sing them.
3. For any psalm that was originally accompanied with mechanical instruments, the essential meaning of the psalm is lost without instrumental accompaniment.

First, please note that the commands of [Ephesians 5:19](#) and [Colossians 3:16](#) do **not** say, "*speaking to one another in [all Old Testament psalms and hymns and spiritual songs](#)*" or "*teach and admonish one another in [all Old Testament psalms and hymns and spiritual songs](#)*". No where are we commanded to employ **every** psalm recorded in the [Old Testament](#). The number, source, and order of the psalms are simply not

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specified in [Ephesians 5:18-20](#) or [Colossians 3:16](#). May we dare not limit what God has not limited. Whatever God leaves open-ended, let us do the same. Now, the nature and capability of the psalm are specified (spiritual teaching and thanksgiving), so let us dare not take away from that.

Secondly, let us test this first assumption for practical, consistent application. (If we cannot keep it consistently, then something must be wrong with our initial assumption.) Are mechanical instruments used to praise God where you worship? If so, please let us make this directly applicable and consider these questions: Where you worship, do they sing **all** 150 psalms of the Old Testament? What about the ones that are included in line with the narrative, like those found in [I Chronicles 16:7-36](#) or maybe [II Samuel 22:1-51](#)? (Admittedly, the last one is described merely as a “*song*” that was “*spoken*”. Does that mean there was no musical accompaniment?) This **could** be done, even if no one does it, but **should** it be done?

This continued line of reasoning also challenges the second assumption: Do you sing **this** psalm at worship services and **execute all** of the commands it demands?

*1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*

*2 Let Israel now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

*3 Let the house of Aaron now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

*4 Let those who fear the LORD now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

*5 I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*

...

*10 **All nations surrounded me, But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.***

*11 They surrounded me, Yes, they surrounded me; But **in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.***

*12 They surrounded me like bees; They were quenched like a fire of thorns; **For in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.***

*13 You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the LORD helped me.*

...

*25 Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.*

*26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! **We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.***

*27 God is the LORD, And He has given us light; **Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.***

*28 You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.*

*29 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. ([Psalm 118:1-29](#))*

Did your church immediately proclaim war on all idolatrous, pagan, or unbelieving nations? Did you immediately seek to “*destroy them in the name of the Lord*”? Did you proceed to “*the house of the Lord*” and there “*bind the*

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*sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar*”? Is it not a command to *“bind the sacrifice”*? Where is the phrasing that indicates it was an option?

How about this Psalm?

*1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.*

*2 We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it.*

*3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

*4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land?*

*5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill!*

*6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth -- If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.*

*7 Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!"*

*8 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, **Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!***

*9 **Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!** ([Psalm 137:1-9](#))*

Do you encourage your church to *“dash the little ones against the rock”*, who belong to opposing nations? How do you sing this psalm in your worship?

We could proceed multiplying examples of psalms that should no longer be obeyed. Hopefully, these will suffice to make the point: The Old Testament psalms contain a multitude of references and commands that pertained to carnal Israel in their carnal worship with earthly sacrifices and their carnal mission to secure the physical land of Canaan. Just as those commands no longer authorize genocide and animal sacrifice, they no longer authorize instrumental music. If one insists that they do authorize - even demand instrumental music, then why do they not also demand genocide and animal sacrifice? Whatever approves one approves the other.

Does that lack of authority mean that the Old Testament psalms are not valuable or that some of them cannot be sung? No, there is great value and edification that can be gleaned from the Old Testament, including the Psalms ([I Corinthians 10:6, 11-12](#); [Romans 15:4](#)). However, they no longer hold the power **to command** ([Romans 7:1-7](#))! Therefore, any Old Testament psalm sung holds no more power to command than if we should put the book of Leviticus to song! Please see these articles and this discussion for more details and deeper study regarding the end of the Old Testament's authority:

- [Did not God's people use musical instruments in the Old Testament?](#)
- [The Old and New Testaments](#)

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- Discussion: Authority of the Old Testament versus the New Testament

Lastly, if the accompanying music is so essential to its message, then why did God **preserve only the words**? Why did He not preserve the musical score? ... Why did He tell us to “sing”, “speak”, “teach”, and “admonish” the psalms? How does a guitar “teach”? How does a piano “admonish”? ... Maybe we are emphasizing the wrong part of the psalms?

In summary, there is no basis for requiring **every** Old Testament psalm to be sung, since there is no New Testament command, example, or inference that would lead to such a conclusion. Furthermore, singing **and** obeying every Old Testament psalm would lead us to execute unthinkable acts condemned by the New Testament, such as genocide and animal sacrifice. Therefore, such a requirement must be wrong, since it is opposed to the New Testament itself. Old Testament psalms can be sung in worship, provided that they “teach”, “admonish”, and “speak” what clearly accords with New Testament teaching, uttering no “**uncertain sound**” that would lead to “**confusion**” or misunderstanding (I Corinthians 14:6-9, 33, 40). (Incidentally, there are several Old Testament Psalms duplicated almost verbatim in the hymnal where I worship.) Lastly, the true, essential meaning of the psalms is seen in their ability to satisfy the commands to “teach”, “admonish”, and “speak”. Only Biblical, spiritual words hold such lasting power to forever change the mind.

So, in closing, does your church use mechanical instruments in addition to singing to God, because they are singing Old Testament psalms, which command the use of instruments? If so, do they perform **all** 150 Psalms and those included inline with the Bible narrative? Do they obey **every** command found therein? If not, why not? If the instrumental score is so important, why did God **only** preserve the **words**? How does a mechanical instrument **teach** and **admonish**? ... These are the questions that stick in **my** conscience that prohibit me from using mechanical instruments in worship to God. I ask them of you in all caring and love, only as I ask them of myself.

## Could musical instruments be considered an 'aid' instead of an 'addition'?

"Aids", or "expedients" are anything that may be used to help us carry out God's command for us; however, they are by definition not specified. Instead, justification for expedients falls under the classification of "**generic authority**". This is the realm where God has not specified His wishes, but He has permitted man freedom and judgment in determining how to best obey His command. Examples would include:

- Establishing a church building to facilitate a meeting place in order to comply with the command to assemble (Hebrews 10:23-25)
- Purchasing and distribute teaching material to expedite the commands to preach the gospel and to edify the church (Mark 16:15-16; Ephesians 4:11-16)
- Using song books, pitch pipes, and song leaders to help accomplish orderly singing (Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16)

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All of these are but one way of carrying out God's commands. They have authority in God's general commands. However, none of these things alter God's commands, nor could they rival them. For example, whether a church rents a building, builds a building, or meets in a large home, the command to assemble is still obeyed. However, meeting in only small groups is not an "expedient" or "aid" to assembling. It is in conflict with it. Similarly, instrumental music cannot be considered an expedient, when **vocal music was specified**. There is no room for generic authority in relation to the instrument. It was specified to be the voice and heart; therefore, mechanical instruments and their associated music cannot be considered as an "aid" to vocal music.

Additionally, please consider the question, "Was David's use of instrumental music an aid, or an integral part of the Jewish worship service?". Was it an aid or an addition? If it was a mere aid, then why did it require a commandment from the Lord to be rightfully introduced ([II Chronicles 29:25-27](#))?

Moreover, if one really considers instrumental music to be an aid to the singing, then it should never be heard without the singing that it is claimed to expedite. Ever hear an instrumental solo in the worship of those who advocate the use of musical instruments? If one insists that instruments are indeed an expedient, then they should be willing to inform the conductor and members of the instrumental group that they offer no more glory to God in all their efforts than a lifeless song book or pitch pipe. Will they appreciate, or value that information? Or, do they think they are doing something more?

Arguments that are not genuinely, or consistently followed in practice should not be used to technically sooth one's conscience.

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