

Why we sing from  
*The Psalter*

By Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

**What is the Psalter?**

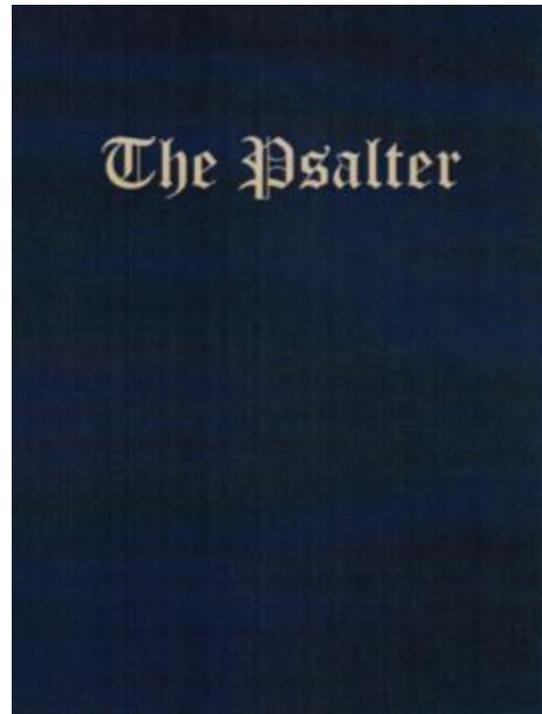
The Psalter is the official songbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches, adopted for use during our worship services. It consists of various versifications of the 150 Psalms as well as two renditions of the Lord's Prayer (numbers 433 and 434). The last few numbers in the Psalter (numbers 414 - 432), entitled "The Chorale Section", consist of several Dutch tunes still sung in some Reformed Churches in the Netherlands today.

In the introduction to the Psalter is found this interesting piece of information. "This Psalter was first published in 1912 by the United Presbyterian Church. It was the fruit of the labors of nearly twenty years, by a committee drawn from nine American and Canadian denominations." When a songbook has been used for as many years as the Psalter has been used in the Protestant Reformed Churches, the members of the church come to know it well. For that reason, the Psalter is highly cherished, and its songs sung with gusto.

**Why use the Psalter?**

The Psalter can be distinguished from other songbooks used in churches. The Psalter is made up of only versifications of the Psalms. Hymnbooks, on the other hand, consist mostly of songs written about different biblical events or religious experiences. Because the Protestant Reformed Churches have chosen to sing Psalms in the worship service, rather than hymns, does not mean that hymns are

wrong. It does not mean that God's people may not sing hymns. There are many hymns that are thoroughly biblical and a joy to sing. Yet, when it comes to our worship services, our denomination is indeed partial to Psalm singing.



There are two reasons we use versifications of the Psalms rather than hymns. The first is that the book of Psalms is the songbook of the Bible. The Psalms are inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded for the edification of the church. What better way to keep a worship service centered in the Word of God than the use of that Word in singing? What better way to keep error out of the church than to limit the songs for worship to God's inspired songbook? Too often error has been introduced into the church by allowing the sweet and melodious, yet

heretical, music and words of men to be sung in the church. Singing versifications of the Psalms safeguards the church from this alluring way that enemies of the truth, at times, use to lead the church astray.

A second reason we use versifications of the Psalms is found in their content. As churches we emphasize the sovereign majesty and glory of God. We preach His sovereign rule, His sovereign grace, and His sovereign purpose for all things. The Psalms are filled with this emphasis. They are filled with depth and meaning as opposed to many hymns, though surely not all, that can be superficial in character. Since the Psalms express the glory and might of God, we enjoy singing them during the worship service because they best express our faith. (See the pamphlet “Questions about the

Worship Services in the Protestant Reformed Churches”)

### **How do I learn the Psalter numbers?**

We know that when a visitor first comes to church these songs may seem somewhat foreign and strange, but the tunes are not difficult to learn. If you are interested you are able to listen to the songs of the Psalter on various CDs and over the internet (for example, <http://www.rsglh.org/frf.htm>).

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