

IN RESPONSE - THE OKC BOMBING AND REDEMPTION

by Dennis Prutow

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What messages should we take from the horror of the recent Oklahoma city bombing. We find proponents of a judgment theory. This bombing is the judgment of Christ on our apostate land. On the other side we have proponents of "the devil made me do it" position. This evil is solely the work of the evil one. So the debate rages on the spectrum between these two poles. I offer another different and what I hope is a more scriptural view taken from Psalm 83:13-16.

O my God, make them like the whirling dust; like chaff before the wind. Like fire that burns the forest, and like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Thy tempest, and terrify them with Thy storm. Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Thy name, O Lord.

Here is a most amazing text. This psalm of Asaph is an urgent prayer for God to act on behalf of His people and break out against His enemies. The request is simple yet powerful and at the same time dreadful. "O my God, make them like the whirling dust; like chaff before the wind." The New International Version says, "Make them like tumbleweed, O my God." The imagery is graphic. We have a prayer that God will deal with people like tumbleweed driven across the prairie, like dirt and debris caught in the vortex of a tornado, "like fire that burns the forest, and like a flame that sets the mountains on fire."

Anyone who has seen a fire storm knows the intensity of the burning to which the psalm refers. A pine tree caught by wind and flame explodes in a torrent of heat, light, and smoke. Multiply that hundreds of times and a picture of utter terror and destruction emerges.

"So pursue them with Thy tempest, and terrify them with Thy storm." The psalmist speaks of tornado, hurricane, rain, and flood. He calls upon God to literally chase men and women with these storms and terrify them with their power. Who of us would pray like this. Terrifying people is reprehensible, correct. Apparently not. The power of the storm is designed to strike terror into hearts of unbelievers.

Asaph continues, "Fill their faces with dishonor." The Authorized Version says, "Fill their faces with shame." The proud and arrogant are brought low. Their power is made weakness in the face of God's storm. All our elegant dams and levees designed to control the Missouri and Mississippi proved hopelessly inadequate in the floods of 1993. Investigations ensued. Engineers and contractors were shame faced. We can tackle any problem, solve any difficulty. Modern thinking, arrogance, fails the test.

Why are people of all ethnic backgrounds, religious persuasions, cultural heritages, male and female to be terrified and humbled? Asaph answers, "That they may seek Thy name, O Lord." Is fear bad? Apparently not. The fear for which Asaph prays is designed to engender a seeking after God. Rescue workers asked a fellow trapped in a car between layers of collapsed freeway after a California earthquake what he did while he was in that car. "I prayed," he said. All other avenues of effort were removed. Fear gripped the heart. Seek God. Pray. What else could be done?

Our response to fear is very often too simplistic and unhelpful. We pat the fellow or gal on the back and say, "Everything will be all right." Everything is not all right and will not be all right unless there is a proper response to the storm engendered terror and fear. Seek the Lord. The proper response to terror produced in situations like the Oklahoma City bombing is to seek the Lord. We must tell people this. National terror and fear arose temporarily in response to the bombing. Psychologists and psychiatrists rushed in to quell the ground swell of fear. Unfortunately this response was the very opposite of the God ordained purpose revealed in Psalm 83. God's purpose was thwarted, his revealed will was openly countered and rebuffed. Was this not the case in the Christian community too? If we have a proper grasp on this portion of God's word. The answer is Yes.

Matthew Henry comments, He [Asaph] prays here that God, having filled their hearts with terror, would thereby fill their faces with shame, that they might be ashamed of

their enmity to the people of God, ashamed of their folly in acting both against Omnipotence itself and their own true interest... Now 1. The beginning of this shame might be the means of their conversion: "Let them be broken and baffled in their attempts, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord!* Let them be put to a stand, that they may have both leisure and reason to pause a little, and consider who it is they are fighting against and what an unequal match they are for him, and may therefore humble and submit themselves and desire conditions of peace. Let them be made to fear thy name, and perhaps that will bring them to seek thy name."

Storm, tempest, disaster, and upheaval bring fear. Fear yields shame. Shame engenders a seeking of the Lord. It seems to me this is the biblical message. This is the biblical message missed by believer and unbeliever alike. This is the biblical message rejected by believer and unbeliever alike in our cultural situation. But it is the message with which we should respond.

We must call men and women to seek God through the use of the means God provides. Westminster Shorter Catechism Question and Answer 88 guide us here. What are the outward means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Knowing storm, tempest, disaster, and upheaval engender a seeking of the Lord, we must encourage such seeking. We must tell fearful souls to attend the means of grace. We must urge them to read the Bible, to attend Bible studies and worship, to sit under the teaching of the Word and to pray. Like Paul, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

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IN RESPONSE - PART 1, WHAT ARE PSALMS, HYMNS & SPIRITUAL SONGS?

by Dennis Prutow

Last time we saw that to worship the way God desires, we must worship in Spirit and truth. We must come before God to honor Him being *possessed* of His Spirit and *guided* by His word. This means taking Colossians 3:16 seriously.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

In taking this text seriously, we must examine what Paul means by “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” As we do so, we must bear in mind our main heading, worship in Spirit and truth.

I also emphasized we must understand the parallel established by Paul in our text. The *content* of our teaching is Scripture and the *content* of our singing is Scripture. The question then becomes one of how far we push this point. We shall attempt to show the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs spoken of by Paul must be certain Scripture songs not simply scriptural songs.

In response, one might argue since the content of our teaching must be Scripture and in a *similar* way the content of our singing must be Scripture, we may sing *scriptural* songs of human composition rather than singing Scripture just as we listen to scriptural teaching of human composition and utter scriptural prayers of human composition. Does this argument follow? The answer is No.

In the first place, we closely examine Colossians 3:16. The Holy Spirit does not say, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing with gratitude in your hearts to God.” While the Holy Spirit defines our teaching in terms of the “word of Christ” and hedges us in by that divine word, the Spirit defines our singing *more closely*. The Spirit, through Paul, tells us the exclusive content of our singing. He directs us to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Our singing is not simply to be scriptural, but as we shall see, God directs us to sing the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of Scripture.

In the second place, this follows from all we have studied up to this point. We

saw this is clearly the case when we looked at “Worship as Service to God” [In Response, Volume III, Number 10]. We even call our times of worship *Worship Services*. If we serve God, we do His bidding, not our own. Oddly, at the heart of the church, her worship, we shrink from doing God’s will and arrogantly proffer our own will worship.

In our study of the Greek word standing behind our English word *liturgy*, we saw how closely worship is regulated. This word often points back to the tightly regulated worship of the Old Testament but it is also used for New Testament worship. [“Liturgy for Life and Worship,” In Response, Volume III, Number 11]. If the liturgy for our worship is set by God, do we dare thumb our noses at God? Do we dare introduce singing, sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15), of our own design rather than sacrifices stipulated by God?

Yet at the heart of the church, in her very bosom, her worship, the infections of the world are the greatest. We demand our way rather than seeking God’s way. Little wonder the church and the world bear so much resemblance. It therefore makes eminent sense the Holy Spirit should stipulate the specific content of our singing in Colossians 3:16. As our next step, we examine what the Spirit, speaking through the apostle Paul means by “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”

First we have the example of Jesus. Following the institution of the Lord’s Supper Jesus and the disciple depart the upper room. “And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). What *hymn* did Jesus and the disciples sing? “At the end of the meal, the customary *hymn*, the *Hallel*, was sung.”¹ This hymn, the Hallel, consisted of Psalms 115-118. The hymn sung by Jesus on this occasion was part of the Old Testament Psalter. We therefore say without reservation the psalms are biblical *hymns*.

Then there is Paul and Silas in prison. “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to

them” (Acts 16:25). What hymns did Paul and Silas sing? The word used here is the same word used in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26. It is a verb meaning “to sing hymns.” These *hymns* were no doubt psalms. How do we know this is true? If the Old Testament psalms are classified by Scripture as hymns, if Paul exhorts us to be filled with the word of Christ, with Scripture, in Colossians 3:16, so as to “sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” and if, in addition, these psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in Paul’s mind refer to the Psalms of the Old Testament, then the hymns sung by Paul and Silas in prison had to be psalms. We are addressing these ifs.

J. A. Alexander affirms the position Paul and Silas sang from the Old Testament Psalter. He tells us Paul and Silas were

singing or chanting, perhaps one or more of the many passages of the Book of Psalms peculiarly adapted and intended for the use of prisoners and others under persecution.... This psalmody of Paul and Silas showed their confidence in God...²

Alexander also says this reference to hymnody refers

not to metrical, much less rhymed hymns, and to artificial melodies, with which we now associate the term, but which are usages of later date.³

It remains to fully affirm this position.

James 5:13 exhorts us to sing to God in a similar manner. “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.” The King James Version gives us a more literal rendering of the text. “Is any merry? let him sing psalms?” The specific and literal exhortation is to sing psalms. As we shall see, these truly are references to the psalms of the Old Testament.

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¹ Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 216.

² J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980) vol. 2, p. 121.

³ *Ibid.*

IN RESPONSE - PART 2, WHAT ARE PSALMS, HYMNS & SPIRITUAL SONGS?

by Dennis Prutow

The popular language of Paul's day was Greek. This was the language of business and commerce much as English is today. As a result, the Greek version of the Old Testament was the popular Bible of the day much as the King James Version was the Bible of choice in the English speaking world until relatively recent times. This Greek version of the Bible was called the Septuagint. In God's providence, the world was prepared for the spread of the gospel through Greek becoming a universal language, the Old Testament being translated into Greek, and the New Testament being written in Greek. The most often quoted version of the Old Testament quoted in the New Testament was the Greek version. Without hesitation, we can say Paul used the Greek Bible, was fully acquainted with it, preached from it, and freely quoted it.

This is important for our understanding of Colossians 3:16. How so? If the Greek Old Testament was Paul's Bible it was foremost in his thinking as he penned his letters. This familiarity comes out in our understanding of Colossians 3:16. First of all, many of the psalms in the Greek version of the Old Testament are called hymns. We look at the titles to the psalms to see this. As an aside, the titles for the psalms are part of the inspired text. In the original Hebrew and in the Greek translation, the titles for the psalms are the denoted the first verse.

Take Psalm 6 as an example. The title in the New American Standard Version reads, "For the choir director; with stringed instruments, upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David." In the Greek Old Testament we find, εἰς τὸ τέλος ἐν ὑμνοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς ὀγδόης ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ. Note the words ἐν ὑμνοῖς which mean, *among the hymns*. In other words, the translators of Greek Old Testament considered Psalm 6 a *hymn*. Paul followed this thinking. Another example is Psalm 61. "For the choir director; on a stringed instrument. A Psalm of David." What is this Psalm of David? The Greek Old Testament again calls it a hymn. εἰς τὸ τέλος ἐν ὑμνοῖς τῷ Δαυιδ. Once again we see the phrase ἐν ὑμνοῖς, *among the hymns*.

Are we building an argument based on a *version* of the Bible rather than on the inspired text itself? Not really. The Holy Spirit was pleased to use the Greek Old Testament in the writing of the New Testament. What we are doing is examining the thinking of Paul behind the words he uses in the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If, as we maintain, Paul considered the Old Testament *psalms* to be *hymns*, then the *hymns* of Colossians 3:16 are *psalms*.

Psalm 72 ends with these words, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" (verse 20). The Greek version of the Old Testament says, "The hymns of David the son of Jesse are ended." [LXX (Greek O.T.) Psalm 71:20, ἐξέλιπον οἱ ὑμνοὶ Δαυιδ τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰεσσαῖ]. In other words, the Greek Old Testament calls Psalms one through seventy-two a group of *hymns*. Because the Greek old Testament was Paul's Bible, when Paul thought of hymns, he automatically thought of the psalms.

In like fashion, the title to Psalm 76 says this psalm is both a *song* and a *psalm*. The New American Standard Version says, "For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph, a Song." Again we note these titles are part of the inspired text. In the original Hebrew and in the Greek Version, the titles are actually part of the first verse of each psalm. The Greek version of this psalm calls it a psalm, a song, and a hymn. εἰς τὸ τέλος ἐν ὑμνοῖς ψαλμὸς τῷ Ἀσά φῶδῃ πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσύριον (Psalm 75:1, LXX). We have these words: ἐν ὑμνοῖς, among the hymns; ψαλμὸς, a psalm; φῶδῃ, a song (ode). All three appellations are given this selection from the Psalter.

Other similar examples are: Psalm 65:1, "For the choir director. A Psalm of David. A Song"; Psalm 66:1 & 68:1, "For the choir director. A Song. A Psalm"; and Psalm 67:1, "For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song." The inspired text of the Old Testament calls each of these psalms both psalms and songs. I emphasize the fact we are probing the mind of Paul. In Paul's Bible, the Psalms of the Old Testament are denoted psalms, hymns and songs. This thinking filled Paul's mind and heart. So when Paul, in Colossians 3:16, writes

about singing psalms, hymns, and songs, in his mind, he refers to the psalms of the Old Testament.

Two other citations are in order.

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres (Nehemiah 12:27).

What hymns and songs did the Levites sing at the dedication of the Jerusalem wall? They were the psalms of David and Asaph.

For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God (Nehemiah 12:46).

Finally, Paul speaks of "spiritual songs." What is song a spiritual song? A spiritual song is a song inspired by the Holy Spirit. Every one of the Old Testament Psalms is therefore a *spiritual* song. Many modern charismatics also insist spiritual songs are songs inspired by the Spirit. They maintain Paul is talking about speaking and singing in tongues. Our study shows this is incorrect.

In like manner, many modern evangelicals insist, when he speaks of hymns, Paul refers to hymns of human composition as those found in modern hymnody. Our study also shows this is incorrect. Those favoring modern hymnody over exclusive psalmody argue fragments of ancient hymns are found in the writings of Paul. Although there are thousands of extant Greek manuscripts verifying the content of the New Testament, there are no separate manuscripts of so-called ancient hymns. Were there such hymns used by the New Testament church, surely some fragment of some hymn would exist. The argument falls due to a lack of such evidence.

We therefore maintain, in the mind of Paul, the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of Colossians 3:16 are the Psalms of the Old Testament.

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IN RESPONSE - A PROOF THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD, PART THREE

by Dennis Prutow

We saw that judged by the canons of historical research, the New Testament documents are both authentic and reliable. These authentic and reliable historical documents present Jesus as a prophet of God authenticated by miracles. This true prophet declares Himself to be equal with God and to be the Son of God.

For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

No other prophet dared declare himself equal with God. Moses knew his place. Samuel and Elijah knew their frailty. John the Baptist knew he was a forerunner not the Messiah. Hebrews tells us, "All these died in faith" (Hebrews 11:13). They died looking for the Messiah, God's Son. They never presumed they fulfilled the ancient promises.

Deuteronomy 18:22 warns,

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

The great miracle predicted by Jesus was the resurrection.

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39-40).

Once announced, if resurrection did not occur, Jesus' ministry would be totally discredited.

The authentic and reliable records of the New Testament present us with the risen Christ. Paul for one recounts the evidence in 1 Corinthians 15:3-9.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared

to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Unabashedly Paul proclaims the risen Christ "appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep." This appearance before more than five hundred people is substantial evidence of the resurrection. Paul tells his readers they can talk to these eyewitnesses because, as he writes, the bulk of them are still alive. "You don't believe Jesus is alive, then talk to these witnesses," Paul seems to say.

A pastor I met took a flower into the pulpit one Resurrection Day. As he read from 1 Corinthians 15, he began, petal by petal, to eat the flower. During the sermon which followed, the pastor asked the congregation, which numbered five hundred plus, "If you leave church today and tell a passerby, 'My pastor ate a flower in the pulpit today,' what would they reply? Would they believe you?" The implicit answer was No. "Suppose several people left the church and told the same passerby, 'Yes indeed, our pastor stood in the pulpit and that rascal actually ate a flower while he read from the Bible.' What is the response now?" The congregation was getting the idea. The innocent passerby would now begin to waver. Adherent denial is turning to assent. "Suppose all five hundred of you in this congregation testified to our innocent bystander that I ate a flower in the pulpit while reading the Bible, would that person accept the testimony of five hundred eye witnesses?" The point is clear. The testimony of five hundred eyewitnesses is incontrovertible. This kind of evidence exists for the resurrection of Christ.

At this point we must believe the record concerning Jesus. We must believe the record concerning Jesus on two counts. First, we must believe His testimony about Himself. He truly is the Son of God. Second, we must believe His tes-

timony about the Bible. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, declares the Bible is the Word of God. Carefully note Jesus' words in Matthew 22:31-32.

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6. Jesus calls these words from Exodus "that which was spoken to you by God." These words of the Bible are the very words of God.

Is this word coming from the pages of the Bible inerrant? Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-18,

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

What is Jesus' estimate of Scripture? Can it err? It cannot err in even the smallest way. It cannot err because God cannot be mistaken. We must therefore come to the Bible as the words of the living God and accord to the words of the Bible the same reverence we would give to God. If the Son of God declares the Bible to be the word of God, how are we to controvert Him?

We summarize our argument that the Bible is the word of God as follows. (1) Beginning with the fact the Bible is a set of historical documents, using the means available to modern historians, we establish the documents of the Bible are both authentic and reliable. (2) We then establish that these authentic and reliable historical documents present Christ as a true prophet of God authenticated by God through miracles. (3) In addition, this true prophet declares Himself to be the Son of God. His assertion is validated by the resurrection. The resurrection is validated by eyewitness accounts. (4) The Son of God declares the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God.

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