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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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— PAVILION —

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MEDITATION

And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

—Exodus 13:20–22

Jehovah's pillar!

What a sight for the children of Israel to behold: Jehovah's pillar. By day a pillar of cloud; by night a pillar of fire. Not that Jehovah's pillar changed, so that during the day it was one substance, and during the night it was another. Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM, changes not. Instead, picture this: a towering inferno of constantly billowing flame that poured out—and was enveloped by—thick smoke. During the day the thick cloud of smoke was prominent in the light of the sun—the pillar of cloud. During the night the flame was prominent as it illuminated the night—the pillar of fire.

Jehovah's pillar!

Jehovah's pillar was entirely unnatural. It did not burn itself out like an ordinary fire or dissipate like an ordinary cloud of smoke but continued before the people day and night. It did not have the shape of an ordinary fire or cloud but was a straight and mighty pillar towering to the heavens, so that the thousands upon thousands upon thousands of the children of Israel could all see it from their places in the camp. Jehovah's pillar was entirely unnatural because it was entirely divine. Jehovah himself went before Israel in the pillar. Jehovah was in the pillar. Jehovah was the pillar. Day and night, the children of Israel saw the visible manifestation of the awesome truth that our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

Jehovah's pillar!

Jehovah was with his people in his pillar in Etham, at the edge of the wilderness. The wilderness was barren. The wilderness was dry. The wilderness was dangerous. What trials the wilderness would hold for Israel! Thirst. Hunger. War. Fear. Sin. Weariness. Death. Our life is that wilderness. Behind is Egypt and bondage. Ahead is Canaan and heaven. In between is this wilderness with all of its sighing and all of its crying and all of its dying. But behold, children of Israel, encamped at the edge of the wilderness: Jehovah's pillar! Behold, you guilty and you weary and you torn and you bloody and you contending and you lonely and you bewildered and you dying ones: Jehovah's pillar!

Jehovah's pillar!

What does Jehovah's pillar do? Here is good news for the wilderness-weary church. Jehovah's pillar leads them the way and gives them light. The wilderness is trackless and impassible, it is dark and deadly; but there is a way through it to Canaan, illuminated with the most cheering light. That way cannot be found by the flesh, but Jehovah's pillar leads us the way. Put simply, the way is Jesus Christ (John 14:6), and the light is Jesus Christ (John 8:12). Through his flesh and blood, we are brought through and out of this black wilderness of sin and death and into heaven. Such is the power of Jehovah's grace that he delivers us from ourselves unto himself. So, beloved church, from the edge of the wilderness, look away from yourself, and with the eye of faith behold Jehovah's pillar!

—AL

Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms (1650)

This is a review of the Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms (SMV). The full title of the SMV is *The Psalms of David in Metre: Translated and diligently compared with The Original Text and Former Translations; More plain, smooth, and agreeable to the text than any heretofore; Allowed by the Authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, and appointed to be sung in Congregations and Families, 1650*. The SMV is often printed under the title *The Psalms of David in Metre*. The SMV is also sometimes known as the Scottish Psalter. To those who use the SMV as their songbook for worship, the SMV is simply known as the Psalter or the Psalms.

Many readers of *Reformed Pavilion*, including the undersigned, are probably not very familiar with the SMV. For generations most members of Remnant Reformed Church, the Reformed Protestant Churches, and the Protestant Reformed Churches have used the Psalter of 1912 for public worship and have never used the SMV of 1650 for public worship. But the SMV is the English psalter. Ever since it was first published in 1650, the SMV has been the most widely-used English psalter in the world. Because of its connection with the Westminster Assembly (1643–1653), the SMV historically was the psalter of choice for Presbyterian denominations, and it is still in use today.

[The SMV] has been sung by countless presbyterians of every stripe around the globe for 350 years. Its persistence is more than a habit of the familiar; at its best, the *Scottish Psalter* has an incomparable majesty of language which sinks deep into the heart. It continues to be

used by various Presbyterian bodies in Scotland, Canada, the United States, Australia, and elsewhere. It has shaped the development of psalters in Turkish, Armenian, Modern Greek, Chinese, Japanese, and other world languages in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹

The occasion for this review is a desire to better understand the Scottish Psalter. This psalter has often been hailed as the most faithful metrical English translation of the psalms. For those English speakers who love the psalms and who are convinced that God has given the psalms to his church as her songbook for worship, there is a keen desire to know more about a faithful English translation of the psalms.

History of the Scottish Metrical Version

The Scottish Metrical Version was born in Geneva, Switzerland, with John Calvin on January 16, 1537. Even though the SMV would not finally be completed and published until 1650, more than a century later, the SMV was born in Geneva.

What happened in Geneva in 1537 was perhaps one of the most overlooked and yet most profound events of the entire Reformation. On January 16, 1537, John Calvin, William Farel, and other ministers in Geneva presented to the governing council of the city their plan for reforming the church. The full title of their document was *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council January 16, 1537*.² Included in the *Articles* was the proposal that the churches in Geneva sing psalms.

¹ Robert M. Copeland, “The Experience of Singing the Psalms,” in *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2009), xv.

² See Andrew Lanning, “John Calvin’s Articles of 1537,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 43 (February 3, 2024): 5–11.

Further, it is a thing very expedient for the edification of the Church, to sing some psalms in the form of public devotions by which one may pray to God, or to sing his praise so that the hearts of all be roused and incited to make like prayers and render like praises and thanks to God with one accord...

On the other hand there are the psalms which we desire to be sung in the Church, as we have it exemplified in the ancient Church and in the evidence of Paul himself, who says it is good to sing in the congregation with mouth and heart.³

The ministers had to propose that the church in Geneva begin singing psalms because the Roman Catholic Church had removed congregational singing from the church for many hundreds of years. With the *Articles* of 1537, Calvin and the other ministers sought to restore congregational psalm singing to the public worship of the Reformed church. The eventual outcome of the *Articles*—after several years of fierce and cruel opposition to Calvin—was that the city council finally agreed to implement Calvin’s proposals, including psalm singing in the congregational worship.

In order for the Genevan church to sing psalms in worship, she needed a metrical psalter in her native French language. From 1538 to 1562, Calvin and others worked on preparing a French psalter for the congregations to sing. All 150 psalms were finally included in the French psalter by 1562, and the result is known as the Genevan Psalter.

The Genevan Psalter had a tremendous impact on the reformation of the church. The psalms so filled the hearts and mouths of the Reformed that even their Roman Catholic enemies complained that the Reformation was being carried along by psalm singing. Historians have observed that the singing of psalms—along with

catechetical instruction—was perhaps more important than anything else for cementing the Reformation in the hearts of God’s people.

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact that the *Geneva Psalter* and its descendants have had upon Reformed worship practice. The popularity of the Psalter was astounding. In the year of its initial publication (1562) the *Geneva Psalter* was issued in twenty-five editions. In four years sixty-two editions followed. According to Doumergue, there were some fourteen hundred editions in all, not to mention translations into English, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Bohemian, Rhaeto-Romanic, Ladin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Gascon, Bernaise, Malay, Tamil, Sessouto, Latin, Hebrew, Slavonian and Zend. In less than two centuries, more than thirty editions were issued in Holland alone, and Germany was not far behind. The Psalms of David thus occupied a place very close to the heart of the Calvinistic Reformation. Florimond de Raemond, a bitter opponent of Calvinism, complained of the metrical Psalms that “nothing has so opened the way to the novelties of these new religions...The new singing, sweet and insinuating, of these rhymed Psalms has been the chain and cordage...by which they have drawn souls.” Certainly the ultimate strength of the Swiss Reformation lay in its return to the doctrines of grace, but the Psalter and the catechism became the means of applying those doctrines to the heart. The Reformation as we know it would have been impossible without them. Reid suggests that Calvin’s teachings, his organization, and his personality may have had much less impact on his contemporaries than is usually assumed to have been the case:

³ J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 48–55; see also “Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva proposed by the Ministers at the Council January 16, 1537,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 43 (February 3, 2024): 7, 10.

The thing that really “grabbed” the common man, the ordinary Calvinist soldier, was something much more mundane: his catechetical training and the congregational singing of the Psalms. More than all the fine theological reasoning, both the catechism and the Psalter entered into the very warp and weft of the humblest members’ lives.

Our Calvinistic heritage, then, is a Psalm-singing heritage, and our Reformed churches, to the extent that they have chosen to forsake that heritage, are no longer Calvinistic in their worship.⁴

God carried the Reformation along to the tune of David. God implanted the Reformation into the heart by the music of the sweet psalmist of Israel.

It was during those days of reformation through psalmody in Geneva that the Scottish Metrical Version was born. At the same time that Calvin was preparing the Genevan Psalter in French, Reformed exiles from English-speaking countries found refuge in Geneva. The English refugees began preparing their own English psalter.

Calvin’s Geneva became a refuge for those persecuted for their faith during the reign of Mary Tudor (1553–1558). One of these was the Scottish Reformer John Knox, who along with other exiles produced a Book of Order for use in the English Congregation at Geneva. This included fifty-one Psalms, this number growing to eighty-seven in the third edition of the Psalter. This Psalter is known as the Anglo-Genevan Psalter...

Knox brought these Psalms back with him from Geneva and in 1562 the General

Assembly of the Church of Scotland directed that the Psalter should be completed.⁵

This version of the English psalter became known as *Sternhold and Hopkins*, named after two principal men who had worked on it. It was much beloved and, after its first publication in 1562, was reprinted more than two hundred times. This was the English psalter that the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower* carried with them to America in 1620. The settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony eventually felt the need to revise their beloved *Sternhold and Hopkins* to be more faithful to the original Hebrew.

In 1650, they published what has ever since been known as the *Bay Psalm Book*, the first book to be published in English-speaking North America. (It was published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the basement of the President’s house at Harvard College, on a press imported specifically for the purpose.)...The ninth edition (1698) included the first music printed in North America. In addition to its importance in American history, its influence can also be found in the *Scottish Psalter* of 1650.⁶

Meanwhile, back in England, the Westminster Assembly was meeting from 1643–1653. In 1646 the Assembly approved a new English translation of the psalms in meter, to be used in England, Scotland, and Wales.

In addition to [producing the Westminster Standards], they also went to great lengths to produce a metrical Psalter that was to be part of the uniformity they sought. In so doing, they wanted to produce a Psalter that was not only more accurate and more smoothly running

⁴ Michael Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, 4th rev. ed. (Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Press, 2011), 266–67. Bushell’s quotation of Florimond de Raemond was taken from Emil Doumerge, “Music in the Work of Calvin,” *PTR* 7 (October 1909): 540. Bushell’s quotation of Reid was taken from J. S. Reid, “The Battle Hymns of the Lord: Calvinist Psalmody of the 16th Century,” *16th Century Essays and Studies*, ed. C. S. Meyer (St. Louis: Foundation for Reformation Research), 37.

⁵ Philip Rainey, “The Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms (1650),” cprc.co.uk/articles/scottishmetricalpsalter/.

⁶ Robert M. Copeland, “The Experience of Singing the Psalms,” xiv.

than those in existence, but also simpler in metre so as to be more easily used by all...

The Assembly was divided into three committees, each responsible for the scrutiny of 50 Psalms. All 150 were subsequently read line by line before the whole Assembly. The Assembly included some excellent Hebrew scholars, such as John Lightfoot, famous for his knowledge of oriental languages and rabbinical writings. The revised versions were sent in batches to Scotland for further examination by the Scottish church.⁷

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland revised and emended Westminster's psalter and approved the resulting psalter in 1650. It is this 1650 version approved by the Church of Scotland that has been known ever since as the Scottish Metrical Version or the Scottish Psalter.

The history of the Scottish Metrical Version from Westminster to Scotland is briefly sketched at the website www.1650psalter.com as follows:

When the singing of Psalms was discussed at the Assembly, it was agreed that there should also be a new Psalter for British churches. The Psalters then in use were quite similar: the Psalters used in English churches (first published in 1562) and in Scottish churches (first published in 1564) were revised from different editions of the same Psalter. These Psalters were known to have some problems in accuracy. Two men, William Barton and Francis Rouse (or Rous), had made two different metrical Psalters, which were submitted to the Westminster Assembly. The Assembly chose Rouse's Psalter for its greater accuracy, and began the work of revising it, to bring it into greater conformity to the original Hebrew.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had dispatched several commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, in order to assist in the proceedings. When these men returned to Scotland with the revised Psalter in 1647, the General Assembly undertook an even more extensive revision, which lasted two years. On November 23, 1649, a commission of the General Assembly authorized the finished Psalter to be the only Psalter sung in congregations after May 1, 1650. Since then, the Scottish Psalter has come to be sung by millions around the world for over three hundred and sixty years.⁸

From Calvin's Geneva to the Pilgrims' *Mayflower* to Westminster to Scotland, the development of the Scottish Metrical Version followed a long and noble history. It represented the Spirit-worked desire of God's people in English-speaking congregations to sing the songs of Zion in the house of their God.

The Guiding Principle of the Scottish Metrical Version: Faithful Metrical Translation

The Scottish Metrical Version was produced under a principle that guided all the labor of the committees and all the decisions of the ecclesiastical bodies that adopted it. That guiding principle could be called the principle of faithful metrical translation.

Principle: Faithful Metrical Translation

Whatever else the Scottish Metrical Version may be, it is above all else a *translation* of the psalms. The SMV takes the psalms as God inspired them in the Hebrew language and translates them into the English language. As a translation, the SMV deals with the psalms word by word, taking the Hebrew words and rendering them into English words. For example, where God used the Hebrew word for *sacrifices/offerings*, the SMV translates it as *sacrifices* or *offerings*. Where God used the Hebrew word for *righteousness*, the

⁷ David Silversides, "The History of the Scottish Psalter," <https://www.salisburyemmanuel.org.uk/assets/public/articles/worship/The-History-of-the-Scottish-Psalter.pdf>, 1-2.

⁸ Sean McDonald and Brad Johnston, "An Introduction to the Scottish Psalter of 1650," <https://1650psalter.com/introduction/>.

SMV translates it as *righteousness*. Along the way the SMV renders the Hebrew sentences into grammatically correct English translations of those sentences. For example, where the inspired Hebrew might have the phrase “trust ye to Jehovah,” the SMV might render it with the phrase “trust ye *in* the Lord,” which would be the normal English way of expressing that particular phrase. Thus Psalm 4:5, for example, in the literal Hebrew, in the King James Version (KJV) translation, and in the SMV translation:

Hebrew

Sacrifice ye sacrifices of righteousness
And trust ye to Jehovah.

KJV

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And put your trust in the LORD.

SMV

Off’rings present of righteousness
And in the Lord trust ye.

That the SMV aimed to be a translation of the psalms is evident from the full title: *The Psalms of David in Metre: Translated and diligently compared with The Original Text and Former Translations; More plain, smooth, and agreeable to the text than any heretofore; Allowed by the Authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, and appointed to be sung in Congregations and Families, 1650.*

As a *translation* of the psalms, the SMV is distinguished from all *paraphrases* of the psalms. Whereas a translation of the psalms aims to render the actual Hebrew words of the psalms into a faithful English translation, a paraphrase only aims to reproduce, rephrase, and restate the ideas and thoughts of the psalm without strictly adhering to the actual words of the psalms. In some places a paraphrase might be very close to the words of the psalm. But in other places a paraphrase might depart very widely from the words of the psalm. A paraphrase

might even use an idea in the psalm as a springboard to introduce other ideas that are not in the psalm. A paraphrase takes liberty with the psalm—adding to, subtracting from, summarizing, spinning, or ignoring the psalm as the paraphrase sees fit.

For example, the 1912 Psalter is a paraphrase of the psalms. In some places the Psalter is very close to the actual psalm. In other places the psalm is hardly recognizable in the Psalter. For example, for Psalm 4:5, referenced above, the Psalter has, “Lay upon God’s altar good and loving deeds, and in all things trust Him to supply your needs” (Psalter #7). A comparison with the literal Hebrew and the KJV translation shows how much license the 1912 Psalter took with the actual psalm.

Hebrew

Sacrifice ye sacrifices of righteousness
And trust ye to Jehovah.

KJV

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And put your trust in the Lord.

Psalter

Lay upon God’s altar
Good and loving deeds
And in all things trust Him
To supply your needs.

Over against such paraphrasing, the SMV is a translation of the psalms. The SMV was “translated and diligently compared with the original text” and is “more...agreeable to the text than any heretofore.”

Principle: Faithful Metrical Translation

The Scottish Metrical Version also aimed to be a *metrical* translation of the psalms. That is, the SMV translated the psalms in such a way that each line has a set number of syllables, and the ends of certain lines rhyme. When the psalms are translated in meter, they can be set to tunes that match the meter. In this way the psalms can

easily be sung by an English-speaking congregation.

In the original Hebrew language, the psalms—as well as all Hebrew poetry—do not make use of the cadence, the meter, or the rhyme that English poetry does.⁹ Not following a set meter, each line in the Hebrew psalm can have a widely varying number of syllables. Not having a set rhyme, each line in the Hebrew psalm has its own sound that does not necessarily match the sound of any other line. Hebrew poetry is beautiful, but its beauty lies in the *meaning* of the words rather than in the *sound* of the words. Hebrew poetry does not balance cadence or rhythm or rhyme, but Hebrew poetry does balance thought and meaning. Instead of rhyming sounds, Hebrew psalms “rhyme” thoughts. There are often two and sometimes three parallel thoughts lined up in the psalms. The beauty of Hebrew poetry is in the interplay and mutual illumination of those parallel thoughts.

Take Psalm 103:3, for example.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
Who healeth all thy diseases.

In this verse the psalmist is not listing two different benefits of God’s salvation: the forgiveness of iniquities, on the one hand, and the healing of diseases, on the other. Rather, the psalmist is describing one blessing: the forgiveness of all thine iniquities. The psalmist repeats that one blessing using other words and other imagery to say the same thing a different way: the healing of all thy diseases. The beauty of the poetry is this balance of parallel thoughts that illuminate each other, each line filling out the full meaning of the other so that the people of God have a rich understanding of this benefit from God.

When translating the psalms from Hebrew into English, a translator could decide to translate into *prose*. That is, the translator could render the psalm into English without trying to fit the translation into meter and without trying to

line up rhyming words. The King James Version is a translation of the Hebrew psalms into prose. Psalm 23, for example:

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.

However, a translator could also decide to translate into *verse* or into *meter*. That is, the translator could render the psalm into English in such a way that each line has a set number of syllables and in such a way that the ends of certain lines rhyme. The Scottish Metrical Version is a translation of the Hebrew psalms into meter. Notice that each line has a set number of syllables (eight syllables in lines one and three, six syllables in lines two and four), and the ends of lines two and four rhyme.

- ¹ The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want.
² He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Whether translating into prose or into verse/meter, the translator works word by word through the Hebrew psalm to render it into a faithful and grammatically correct English translation.

Hebrew

- ¹ Jehovah my shepherd;
I shall not lack.
² In pastures of grass
He causeth me to lie down.
Upon waters of rest
He leadeth me.

KJV

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
² He maketh me to lie down
In green pastures:

⁹ Hebrew psalms probably do have a cadence, though ears attuned to English may not immediately recognize it. Hebrew makes use of pauses (“Selah”), which pauses indicate some kind of cadence. But it would be difficult to replicate that exact cadence in translation. For this reason an English translation has to be set to its own cadence or meter.

He leadeth me
Beside the still waters.

SMV

¹The Lord's my shepherd
I'll not want
²He makes me down to lie
In pastures green:
He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Principle: Faithful Metrical Translation

Not only did the SMV aim to be a metrical translation of the psalms, but it also aimed to be a faithful and accurate translation of the psalms. The translators “diligently compared” their translation “with The Original Text” of the psalms. The translators not only aimed for a translation “agreeable to the text” of the original Hebrew, but “more...agreeable to the text than any heretofore.” Again, the full title of the SMV is *The Psalms of David in Metre: Translated and diligently compared with The Original Text and Former Translations; More plain, smooth, and agreeable to the text than any heretofore; Allowed by the Authority of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, and appointed to be sung in Congregations and Families, 1650.*

The principle of faithfulness to the original text guided the translators in those instances in which the English words that were needed to stay faithful to the Hebrew original would not fit into the exact meter or would not produce true rhymes. In those instances something had to give. Either the translators would have had to sacrifice accuracy in the translation for the sake of maintaining the meter and the rhyme, or the translators would have had to sacrifice the meter and the rhyme for the sake of maintaining an accurate translation. In the case of the Scottish Metrical Version, the translators decided in favor of an accurate translation, even if they had to sacrifice the meter and the rhyme. So, for example, try singing Psalm 1:3 in the SMV to the tune of Psalter #1 in the 1912 Psalter. You will have to squeeze both syllables of “river” into one note, and you will have to do it again with “never.” In

addition, “river” and “never” do not truly rhyme. In addition, the SMV could not finish verse 3 in one stanza and so had to finish the last line of the verse at the beginning of the next stanza.

KJV

³And he shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
His leaf also shall not wither;
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.
⁴The ungodly are not so:
But are like the chaff
Which the wind driveth away.

SMV

³He shall be like a tree that grows
Near planted by a river,
Which in his season yields his fruit,
And his leaf fadeth never.
And all he doth shall prosper well.
⁴The wicked are not so
But like they are unto the chaff,
Which wind drives to and fro.

The translators of the SMV deliberately made sacrifices in the form, meter, and rhyme for the sake of maintaining an accurate translation. In this the translators of the SMV followed a sound Reformation tradition that had characterized earlier versions of English psalters. For example, in Calvin's Geneva the English-speaking congregation in 1556 wrote the following in their preface to their Church Order:

Now, to make you privy also why we altered the rhyme in certain places of him [Thomas Sternhold], whom for the gifts that God had given him, we esteemed and revered, this may suffice: that in this enterprise, we did only set God before our eyes, and therefore weighed the words and sense of the prophets, rather considering the meaning thereof than what any man had written. And chiefly

being in this place [*Geneva*], whereas most perfect and godly judgment did assure us, and exhortations to the same encourage us, we thought it better to frame the rhyme to the Hebrew sense, than to bind that sense to the English metre; and so either altered for the better, in such places as he had not attained unto, or else where he had escaped part of the verse, or sometimes the whole, we added the same, not as men desirous to find faults, but only as such which covet to hide them, as the learned can judge.¹⁰

In these words is expressed the SMV's principle of faithfulness to the text: "We thought it better to frame the rhyme to the Hebrew sense, than to bind that sense to the English metre."

Others have pointed out instances in the SMV where the English translation captures the shades of meaning of the Hebrew words, so that what might look like word "padding" to fit the meter is actually a finer expression of the Hebrew text. One David Silversides has explained as follows:

We can look at a few simple examples of the care taken in translation of the Scottish Psalter, showing how they sought to bring out the meaning of the Hebrew text.

In Psalm 46:1, our prose version (AV) speaks of God as "a very present help in trouble", whereas the metrical version has "in straits a present aid". Both are perfectly legitimate translations, but the Hebrew word (*tsarah*) translated 'trouble' is from a word that means 'to press'; and so the word 'straits' brings out even more of the original sense. It is the idea of being 'pressed', of being in a tight spot, of being under pressure. The converse is found in those Psalms where the psalmist refers to the Lord setting his feet in "a large room" or "a large place" (Psalm 31:8 and Psalm

118:5 & 6) in contrast to being hemmed in or being under pressure - thus the word 'straits' is a very good rendering of that expression.

In some places where extra syllables are needed to fit the metre, very simple methods are used. For example, whereas in our Authorised Version, normally 'Jehovah' in the Old Testament is rendered LORD (in capital letters to tell us that it is referring to 'Jehovah'), in Psalm 31:5 it is simply left as Jehovah in the metrical version.

To give perhaps a less well-known example, in Psalm 78:63 the metrical version reads, "The fire consum'd their choice young men". The phrase 'young men' (*bachur*) is rendered 'choice young men'. At first sight, we might think an extra word has been added only to make it fit the metre. It is certainly true that they have made the line fit the right number of syllables, but it isn't just 'padding', because the word 'young men' in this place is a word derived from a verb (*bachir*) that means 'to choose'. It is the same word which is used in Isaiah 40:30 "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall". It means the 'cream' of the young men, the 'choicest' of them. The metrical version, in adding the word 'choice' is not just plucking a word out of the air and putting it in to make the line fit, but in making it fit the metre, they have included the idea of 'choice' or 'chosen' which is actually implied in the Hebrew.

A final example may be given: "I intreated thy favour with my whole heart" (Psalm 119:58, A.V.) in the Psalter becomes, "With my whole heart I did entreat thy face and favour free". The Authorised Version has a marginal note

¹⁰ *The Genevan Book of Order: The Form of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments, etc. Used in the English Congregation at Geneva (1556)*, archived at https://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualnls/GBO_ch02.htm. The brackets in the quotation were added by an editor to explain the references to "him" and to "this place."

attached to “favour” which reads “Heb: face”, because the Hebrew idea of favour is of ‘turning the face towards’. Our metrical version simply incorporates both terms.

We must not assume that when the metrical Psalter uses more words than the prose, that they are simply made up words. Generally speaking, when they use more words to fit the metre, the metrical translators are normally drawing out more of what is in the actual Hebrew. That is why competent authorities confirm that it is an accurate version and even hostile critics of the style frequently concede the accuracy.¹¹

Analysis of the Scottish Metrical Version’s Guiding Principle

The Scottish Metrical Version’s principle of faithful metrical translation is the SMV’s greatest strength. The result of that principle was the production of a faithful psalter that an English-speaking congregation can sing. The principle of faithful metrical translation commends itself to the mind of faith as the appropriate principle for a congregation and denomination that desire to sing the songs of God.

First, the principle of faithful metrical translation deals with the psalms according to their character as the inspired word of God. The psalms are not the word of man; the psalms are the word of God. Men did not author the psalms; God did. Men did not choose the words of the psalms; God did. The psalms are not man’s words; the psalms are God’s words about himself that he gave to his servant so that his Spirit-filled servant could sing God to God in God. The psalms—down to every word and every letter—were “given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16). The psalms are the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). The psalms “came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. 1:21). In the psalms the Spirit of the Lord spake by the sweet

psalmist of Israel, and God’s word was in the psalmist’s tongue (II Sam. 23:1–2).

Therefore, when men translate the psalms, they must deal with the psalms as the word of God. When men translate the psalms, they must not imagine that the words of the psalms become subject to the whimsy of man. When men versify the psalms, they must not imagine that they are composing human songs that are more or less based on divine songs. Rather, men must handle the psalms as the very word of God. Men must handle each word of each psalm as the very word of God. The principle of faithful metrical translation deals with the psalms as the word of God, producing a faithful translation of the very words that God inspired.

The principle of faithful metrical translation sets the Scottish Metrical Version above all psalters that merely paraphrase the psalms. A paraphrase of the psalms does not aim at faithful rendering of the very words of the psalms but only aims to rephrase the ideas and thoughts of the psalms. A paraphrase grants itself license to be as strict or as loose with the actual words of the text as it desires. And a paraphrase grants itself that license in the name of communicating the *ideas* and the *concepts* of the text. So, for example, those who produced the 1912 Psalter wrote,

The names of nations hinder the use of Psalms LXXXIII [83] and LXXXVII [87]. Is it essential to retain these names, and sing such a verse as this

“Gebal, and Ammon, Amalek,
Philistia, those of Tyre,
And Assur joined with them, to help
Lot’s children they conspire”?

The Committee retained some names to show the history referred to, and instead of the others made it, “The nations far and near,” including the hostile peoples of to-day with those of the past. In the Eighty-Seventh Psalm the names are given literally, but all in one central

¹¹ David Silversides, “The Development of the Scottish Psalter,” <https://www.loughbrickland.org/articles/pdf/ScottishPsalter.pdf>, 5–6.

verse, which may be omitted and the thought retained.¹²

Rather than sticking to the words that God inspired, a paraphrase rephrases, restates, ignores, inserts, spins, and changes the words as it wills in the interest of *ideas* and *understanding*.

But by departing from the words of the psalm, a paraphrase cannot accurately and faithfully deal with the ideas of the psalm either. The ideas and concepts of the psalms are not nebulous fragments of thought. Rather, the ideas and concepts of the psalms are the truth. They are sound doctrine. And that sound doctrine is taught by the words that the Holy Spirit inspired. By translating the psalms word for word into English, the SMV deals accurately and faithfully with the ideas and concepts of the psalms as well. By translating the words of the psalms, the SMV faithfully and accurately renders the true thoughts of the psalms.

Second, the principle of faithful metrical translation commends itself to those who use the King James Version of the Bible. The principle that guided the translation of the KJV could be called the principle of faithful readable translation. The KJV translators translated the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament word for word into grammatically correct English. So careful were the KJV translators that wherever they had to add an English word for the sake of a grammatically correct English sentence, they put the added word in italics. The italics indicate to the reader that the italicized word did not come out of the original Hebrew or Greek but was added by the translators so that the English would be sensible and accurate. The KJV translators also translated with an ear attuned to good style and to the readability of the text. Without changing the words or the meaning of the text, the translators phrased the English with a majesty, cadence, and vocabulary that draws the listener along. The result was an English Bible that is faithful to

the inspired word, understandable to English-speaking people, majestic, and highly readable.

The KJV's principle of faithfully translating the actual words of the scriptures stands over against other translation principles that emphasize the concepts and ideas over the words. For example, it is well known that the New International Version (NIV) followed the principle of functional equivalence (or dynamic equivalence) in translating the scriptures. Functional equivalence values the ideas and the concepts in the text over the actual words of the text. Functional equivalence does not use English words that are *actually equivalent* to the inspired Hebrew and Greek words. Rather, functional equivalence uses English words that are only *functionally equivalent* to the inspired Hebrew and Greek words. That is, the NIV translators looked at the concept that the Hebrew words conveyed and then expressed that concept in their own words in English, even if those English words were not the actual translation of the Hebrew or Greek words. The result of the NIV's principle of functional equivalence is an English Bible in which man's words are substituted for God's words. One can never be sure with the NIV if he is reading God's word or merely man's interpretation and understanding of God's word. The KJV, on the other hand, is an English Bible in which God's actual words are rendered into English.

The Scottish Metrical Version's principle of faithful metrical translation is essentially the same principle as the King James Version's principle of faithful readable translation. Those who use the KJV for its faithfulness in translation have already essentially committed themselves to the principle that underlies the SMV. Those who criticize the NIV for its unfaithfulness have already essentially distanced themselves from psalters that are merely paraphrases.

To put this in terms of a church institute, it would not be consistent for a church to insist on the KJV as her Bible but to use the 1912 Psalter

¹² J. C. K. Milligan, "Psalm Versification—The Uniform Metrical Psalter," in John McNaugher, ed., *The Psalms in Worship: A Series of Convention Papers Bearing upon the Place of Psalms in the Worship of the Church* (Pittsburgh, PA: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), 433. Milligan is quoting from the Scottish Metrical Version of Psalm 83:7–8 as an example of inspired words that "hinder the use" of those psalms in singing.

paraphrase as her psalter. The psalms are the inspired word of God. If the church would not be satisfied with the NIV translation of those psalms in her Bible or with a paraphrase of those psalms, then eventually she cannot be satisfied with the 1912 Psalter's paraphrase of those psalms in her psalter either. If a church insists on a faithful translation of the psalms in her Bible, then she should also insist on a faithful translation of the psalms in her psalter. This is not meant as harsh criticism of the church. There are churches that simply inherited the 1912 Psalter. The 1912 Psalter is all that those churches have known for over a century, going back into the Protestant Reformed Churches to 1924 and going back into the Christian Reformed Church to 1914. A church does not and cannot learn everything all at once. Especially when a church is following more than a century of tradition, it takes much instruction and self-examination for the church to evaluate her tradition. Nevertheless, if a KJV church wants to be consistent in her Bible and her psalter, she would do much better to use the SMV as her psalter, just as she uses the KJV as her Bible.

Third, God gives the church his word through a faithful translation of the scriptures. Just as the KJV is the word of God, so the Scottish Metrical Version is the word of God. When a church sings the SMV, she is not singing the word of man, but she is singing the word of God. The SMV is God's revelation of himself to his church. The SMV is authoritative for the faith and life of the church. The elders could rebuke and exhort from the SMV in their discipline work. The minister could preach his text from the SMV instead of the KJV in his sermons. The deacons could comfort the distressed from the SMV in their administration of the mercies of Christ. Just as the KJV, being a faithful translation, is the very word of God, so the SMV, being a faithful translation, is the very word of God.

God himself approved the concept of translating his word, for the apostles of our Lord often used a translation of the Old Testament scriptures in their teaching and preaching. The

Old Testament was written by God in Hebrew. By the time of the apostles, there was a translation of the Hebrew Bible in Greek, which Greek translation of the Old Testament was known as the Septuagint. In their preaching the apostles would often quote from the Greek Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew original. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as the word of God. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as having God's authority for the faith and life of the people.

So also the Scottish Metrical Version is the psalms. Just as the psalms in a faithful English prose translation are still the psalms, so also the psalms in a faithful English metrical translation are still the psalms. A congregation that has a faithful versification of the psalms has the psalms. When a congregation sings her faithful versification of the psalms, she is singing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or chant the King James Version to sing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or chant the original Hebrew to sing the psalms. When she sings a faithful versification of the psalms in her own tongue, she is singing the psalms.

Fourth, the principle of faithful metrical translation is a matter of the saints' gratitude to God for God's revelation of himself in the psalms. God's revelation of himself in the holy scriptures is a marvelous and gracious condescension of God to his church. Man by searching could not find out God (Job 11:7). But God in grace has spoken unto his church (Heb. 1:1–2). In grace God gave us the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ (II Tim. 3:15). In grace God breathed every word of the scriptures for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (v. 16). God commanded his servants—the prophets and apostles—to commit his revealed word to writing from a special care which he has for us and our salvation (Belgic Confession 3). As part of the inspired scriptures, the psalms reveal God in the face of Jesus Christ; for Jesus Christ is the sweet psalmist (II Sam. 23:1–2), and the psalms are Jesus'

songs (Heb. 2:12). Therefore, the church of Jesus Christ receives these psalms with gratitude as the revelation of God in Christ. And when the church in English-speaking lands needs the Hebrew psalms in her own native tongue, she gratefully strives for accuracy and faithfulness in her English translation. In thanksgiving to God for giving her the music of heaven, she does not want to miss a note of Zion's songs.

The principle of faithful metrical translation, then, is not a matter of the law but of the gospel. That is, the church does not seek a faithful translation in order to gain salvation but because she has salvation. God loves her and gave her his word and eternal life; she loves God for it and treasures his word above all. Her careful handling of God's psalms in a faithful metrical translation does not come out of the law: do this and live. Rather, her careful handling of God's psalms in a faithful metrical translation comes out of the gospel: live and do this.

In short, the Scottish Metrical Version's principle of faithful metrical translation is the soundest principle for a psalter and commends itself to the child of God as its greatest strength.

The Experience of Singing the Scottish Metrical Version

What is it like to sing the Scottish Metrical Version of the psalms?

First, singing the Scottish Metrical Version is profoundly spiritual. The Scottish Metrical Version is the psalms, and the psalms are the songs of Jesus Christ. The psalms are Christ's words to God; the psalms are Christ's words about God; the psalms are Christ's words from God. Jesus sang the psalms in the Old Testament by his Spirit through Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and others. Jesus sang the psalms by the Spirit from his heart and with his mouth and lips during his life on earth. Jesus continues to sing the psalms with his brethren in the midst of the church today by his Spirit in the hearts and mouths and lips of his people. By his word and Spirit, Jesus is very really among

his people in his congregation, singing praise unto God. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12).

That the brethren of Christ may sing with Christ is a wonder of God's grace. It is no less a miracle than the healing of the dumb. He whose tongue is tied by nature and is unable to utter the things of heaven has his tongue loosed by Christ's Spirit to utter Christ's songs with Christ. He who naturally has no wisdom to frame words as he ought is illuminated by Christ's Spirit to utter heaven's songs with heaven's King. He who naturally has no right to take upon his lips the holy things of God in the holy presence of God is ushered into God's presence through the veil of Christ's rent flesh to sing with his mediator the songs of the chief musician. To be a member of Christ by the wonder of God's grace, animated by the very Spirit of Christ by the wonder of God's grace, singing the very words of Christ with Christ by the wonder of God's grace is tremendously, profoundly spiritual.

Those who may fear that the SMV will be unfamiliar and strange to them can take heart that the SMV is the psalms. The psalms are familiar to Christ; the psalms are familiar to Christ's Spirit; and the saints will find the psalms as they are rendered in the SMV to be familiar to their hearts as well. Though some tunes and some phrasing may be unfamiliar, the people of God will find themselves right at home among the songs of their savior.

Second, singing the SMV is a relief. Many of those who read *Reformed Pavilion* have used the 1912 Psalter's paraphrase of the psalms all their lives. As one looks more and more into the principle behind the paraphrasing and as one more and more compares the 1912 Psalter with the psalms, one becomes more and more dissatisfied with his paraphrase.¹³ This dissatisfaction does not happen overnight. The psalter that one sings from his youth up has a claim on his soul. It is familiar, and it has shaped his preferences. But as one discovers passages in his psalter that

¹³ See Andrew Lanning, "The Psalter," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 12 (July 1, 2023): 11–16.

are the inventions of men and are not the words of the sweet psalmist of Israel, he becomes dissatisfied and may even feel deceived. And as he discovers passages in the psalms that are entirely omitted from his psalter, so that in all his singing in all his life, he has never been able to sing that part of the psalm with his Lord, he begins to feel cheated. His Spirit-wrought desire is to sing the songs of his savior with his savior. He marvels that he has the right to sing with Christ the songs of Christ as the gift of his merciful God to him. But his psalter lets him down. He wonders whether the words that have left such an imprint upon his soul over the years are really the psalm. He is heartened to find much that is accurate, but he is dismayed to find so many passages that are not the words of the sweet psalmist. Though they may yet be sweet-sounding words, they are the words of another poet than his Lord. When he sings from his psalter, he cannot help but wonder, “Is this really the psalm? What has been changed? What has been added? What has been left out?”

But when that man gets the SMV in his hands, there is relief that he can trust the translation as the psalms. The SMV gives that man the psalms of Jesus as Jesus inspired them, faithfully translated so that he can sing the Lord’s songs in English with his Lord. What relief!

Opponents of exclusive psalmody may pounce on this relief as if it were a matter of law. For some reason some opponents of exclusive psalmody think that dissatisfaction with the 1912 Psalter and the desire for a more accurate psalter is proof of legalism. They interpret any inclination toward the Scottish Metrical Version as a symptom of bondage. The argument seems to be that legalists bind men’s consciences under more and more laws, allowing relief to men’s consciences only when men have kept all the laws. The argument seems to be that exclusive psalmody is a legalist’s law that takes away the freedom of God’s people to such a degree that not only must they sing exclusively psalms

in church, but they also must sing the psalms from the right psalter.

However, the opponents’ arguments are invented out of thin air. The relief of singing the SMV has nothing whatsoever to do with law. The relief is not this: now I have finally kept the law of psalm singing, or now I have finally kept the law of psalm singing better, or now I have finally kept the law of psalm singing enough. As far as keeping the law goes, the child of God’s relief is always and only this: Christ has already kept the law for me, and Christ has already redeemed me from the curse of the law!

The relief of singing the SMV has nothing to do with the law but is rather the relief of having the word of God. It is the relief of being able to rest in the word of God and trust in the word of God without the admixture of man’s word. It is the same relief that one might have who discovers the King James Version of the Bible after being raised on the Living Bible Paraphrased. Whereas his Living Bible Paraphrased deceived him with “As many as wanted eternal life, believed,” his King James Version accurately told him, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). So also, whereas a man’s 1912 paraphrase deceived him with “And hindered the work His grace had begun,”¹⁴ his SMV accurately told him, “Yea, turning back, they tempted God.”¹⁵ For those whose psalter paraphrase sows questions about what they are singing, it is a relief to have a faithful translation of the psalms to sing.

Third, the Scottish Metrical Version is singable. In fact, the SMV is remarkably and wonderfully singable. Perhaps one of the most common assumptions when one first picks up a SMV is that it will be difficult to sing. The SMV has certain obvious peculiarities that appear to be barriers to singability: no musical notation, truncated words, forced rhymes, crammed syllables, awkward wording. Especially when one has used the 1912 Psalter, in which the English style is pristine and in which syllables are almost never crammed and rhymes are almost

¹⁴ Psalter #213, stanza 13.

¹⁵ Psalm 78:41.

never forced, one might see the SMV as very awkward indeed. But after a very short time, navigating the peculiarities of the SMV becomes second nature. For the first few psalms one selects, one might stumble in his singing here and there, just as one would when trying anything for the first time. But after a very brief time, one learns what to expect, and one becomes familiar and comfortable with what at first seemed peculiar. After one learns how to navigate the first five psalms or so, one finds that he knows how to navigate all the rest of the psalms in the SMV as well.

The matter of singability is important for those who fear that singing the SMV will be miserable. Those raised on the 1912 Psalter are familiar with it. They know their psalter. They are comfortable with it. They may fear that singing from a new psalter will be nothing but labor and sorrow for them. These fears are completely understandable. But the SMV is singable! Wonderfully and joyfully and comfortably singable! With a little practice, one finds that he is not merely enduring the SMV but that he positively delights in singing the SMV.

Fourth, the SMV is majestic and devotional. The SMV uses an exalted and beautiful English style. The English is not only a faithful translation but is also majestic and reverent and poetic and devotional. The English of the SMV is in the very same vein as the English of the King James Version of the Bible. Someone who is familiar with the style of the SMV has written this about the SMV's persistence through the years: "Its persistence is more than a habit of the familiar; at its best, the *Scottish Psalter* has an incomparable majesty of language which sinks deep into the heart."¹⁶

Peculiarities of the Scottish Metrical Version

The Scottish Metrical Version has certain peculiarities that require a brief explanation. These peculiarities are not necessarily weaknesses, but they are things that one will have to learn as he gets acquainted with the SMV.

First, all 150 psalms in the SMV are set to common meter. The meter refers to how many syllables are in each line. *Common meter* means that the syllable pattern is 8 6 8 6. That is, there are eight syllables in the first line, six in the second, eight in the third, and six again in the fourth. For example, Psalm 1:1:

That man hath perfect blessedness (8)
Who walketh not astray (6)
In counsel of ungodly men, (8)
Nor stands in sinners' way. (6)

The meter determines which tunes can be used to sing the words. Tunes that are labeled as C.M.—meaning *common meter*—follow the same 8 6 8 6 pattern as the SMV. For example, the tune *Meditation* (Psalter #1 in the 1912 Psalter) is in common meter and can be used to sing Psalm 1 in the SMV.

The only exception to the SMV's use of common meter is that occasionally the SMV will include two versions of the same psalm. In that case one of the versions will be in common meter, and the other will be in some other meter. For example, the first translation of Psalm 100 in the SMV is in long meter (8 8 8 8) and can be sung to the familiar tune *Old Hundredth* (Psalter #268 in the 1912 Psalter and the tune for the popular hymn "Praise God"). The second translation of Psalm 100 in the SMV is in common meter. Or, for example, the first translation of Psalm 124 in the SMV is in common meter, but the second version is metered with ten syllables in each line and can be sung to the familiar tune *Old 124th* (Psalter #353 in the 1912 Psalter).

There are two implications of the fact that every psalm in the SMV is in common meter. First, one could use the same tune to sing every psalm. For example, the tune *New Britain* (the tune used for the popular hymn "Amazing Grace") is in common meter and could be used to sing all 150 psalms. This makes the learning curve for the SMV remarkably low. One does not have to learn 150 new tunes to sing the SMV but

¹⁶ Robert M. Copeland, "The Experience of Singing the Psalms," xv.

can sing the entire psalter even if he knows only one tune.

The second implication is that many familiar and beloved tunes that are not in common meter could not be used to sing the SMV. For example, not every tune from the 1912 Psalter can be used to sing the SMV. The 1912 Psalter deliberately made use of forty-seven different meters for the sake of variety and interest, drawing its tunes from a wide tradition of church music, classical music, regional music, and popular music. The 1912 Psalter is a master class in tunes and music. For example, most people in the world know the tune *Herald Angels* (used in the Christmas carol “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”), which tune was composed by the renowned classical composer Felix Mendelssohn. The 1912 Psalter makes use of that tune in Psalter #3. But the tune *Herald Angels* has a meter of seven syllables in each line, not common meter, and could not be used with the SMV. So it is with many of the tunes in the 1912 Psalter. Perhaps most distressingly, the beloved Reformation tune *Pierre* could not be used with the SMV at the occasion of baptism. The tune *Pierre* has been used since 1562 in Calvin’s Genevan Psalter, in the Dutch Psalter for Psalm 105, and in the 1912 Psalter for Psalter #425. Generations of Dutch Reformed congregations have sung Psalm 105 to the tune *Pierre* at the occasion of every baptism (Psalter #425, stanza 5). But *Pierre* is in 9 9 8 8 8 8 meter, not common meter. A congregation that uses the SMV could still sing Psalm 105 at the occasion of baptism, but the congregation could not sing that beloved tune.

By using only common meter, the SMV is rich in accessibility—anyone can access all 150 psalms with only one tune. But by using only common meter, the SMV is limited in variety, with many familiar and traditional and beloved tunes being unusable.

However, the 1912 Psalter has around one hundred common meter tunes, which means that those who know that psalter would have a good start on familiar tunes with which to sing the SMV. There are also many familiar common

meter tunes that the 1912 Psalter does not use that could be used for the SMV—tunes such as *New Britain* (“Amazing Grace”) and *Crimond* (often used for Psalm 23).

The second peculiarity of the SMV is that it does not assign specific tunes to specific psalms. One is free to select any suitable common meter tune to sing any psalm. In fact, the SMV is usually printed without any musical notation whatsoever but with only the words of the psalms. When one first opens the SMV, his first reaction might be, “Where’s the music?” Those who use the SMV must not only open to a particular psalm, but they must also have ready an appropriate tune.

By comparison, the 1912 Psalter assigns each psalter number its own dedicated tune, with the music printed on the same page as the psalter number. When one sings Psalter #53, one always sings it to the tune *Evan*, with all the words lined up to the appropriate notes. When one sings Psalter #268, one always sings it to the tune *Old Hundredth*.

The advantage of the SMV’s not assigning specific tunes to the psalms is that anyone anywhere can pick up the SMV and sing it from day one without having to learn many new and unfamiliar tunes. A congregation that has no knowledge of traditional church music could sing all the psalms using any common meter tune. In fact, the SMV could easily be introduced into cultures that have an entirely different tradition of music than the West. As long as the people understood English and as long as they could adapt one of their culture’s tunes to common meter, they could sing the SMV.

The disadvantage of the SMV’s not assigning specific tunes to the psalms is the potential of breaking the connection between tune and psalm. When one tune is used for one psalm, the tunes become so wedded to the psalms in one’s soul that the tune instantly brings the words of the psalm to mind. Those who sing the 1912 Psalter only need to hear a small snatch of a tune to know the words that go with it. In the wee hours of the morning with the baby, the sleepy mother

finds the familiar tune to be invaluable in bringing the psalm to her heart. In the wee hours of the morning with mother, the hungry baby already begins to learn the melody of his worship as mother hums and softly sings about their shepherd. In times of weariness, elation, distress, joy, and persecution, the child of God does not have to rack his brain to come up with the words of a psalm. The melody that he has sung scores and hundreds of times carries the words of the psalm effortlessly to his heart and lips.

If a congregation prefers to have a particular tune for each psalm, it could easily do this. After practicing with the SMV for a little while, the congregation could decide that it will sing Psalm 1 to such and such a tune, Psalm 2 to another tune, and so on. As a congregation becomes more familiar with the SMV, it will very likely happen that the congregation will always sing a particular psalm to a particular tune. In this way those who use the SMV could have the same advantage as those whose psalters assign a specific tune to a specific number.

The third peculiarity of the SMV is that it is not strict with its syllables or with its rhymes. With regard to syllables, the SMV will sometimes squeeze two syllables into one beat of the meter. For example, Psalm 20:2 requires that the four syllables of the word *sanc-tu-ar-y* be sung in three syllables in order to fit the line: “out of his sanc-chwar-y.”

Other times the SMV will stretch one syllable into two beats of the meter. The three-syllable word *sal-va-tion* often has to be sung as four syllables: *sal-va-shee-un*. For example, in Psalm 3:8, this is the only way to stretch the first line into eight syllables: “Salvation doth appertain.”

With regard to rhymes, the SMV will use words that are not true rhymes. For example, “came” is rhymed with “Ham” in Psalm 105:23. Or “conclude” is rhymed with “good” in Psalm 14:1. Or “high” is rhymed with “gloriously” in the second translation of Psalm 50:2.

This inexact syllabification and imperfect rhyming is perhaps the main thing that makes the SMV sound awkward to someone who is

trying to use it for the first time. One perhaps even feels silly the first few times he tries it. By comparison, the 1912 Psalter only very rarely strays from a strict and exact syllabification. Each syllable in the 1912 Psalter almost always enjoys its own beat in the meter. And every rhyme in the 1912 Psalter is a true rhyme.

Even though this peculiarity of the SMV makes it sound awkward at first, it is exactly here that the SMV’s principle of faithfulness in translation shines through. The translators were aiming at a faithful translation above all. In those places where the translators had to choose between an exact translation or an exact rhyme, they chose the exact translation. “We thought it better to frame the rhyme to the Hebrew sense, than to bind that sense to the English metre.”

In actual practice the inexact rhymes and syllables pose no real barrier to singing and loving the SMV. After learning how it is done through five or six psalms, one quickly adjusts to handling the peculiar syllabification and the inexact rhymes with hardly a second thought. Especially when one understands the reasoning behind it, one can greatly appreciate that he is singing the “Hebrew sense,” even if he is not singing a perfect rhyme.

The fourth peculiarity of the SMV is its occasional use of very archaic language. The somewhat infamous example is Psalm 18:26.

Pure to the pure, froward thou kyth’st
Unto the froward wight.

Perhaps a Scotsman in 1650 knew what that meant, but very few people today would recognize it. The KJV translates Psalm 18:26 as “With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.” Before one could sing that in the SMV, one would have to know that *froward* means *evilly disposed toward*; *kyth’st* is a contraction of *kythest* and means *to show* or *to manifest*; and *wight* means *man*. So Psalm 18:26 in the SMV means:

(Thou showest thyself) pure to the pure,
froward thou showest (thyself)
Unto the froward man.

The archaic language of the SMV will not be any great barrier to one who is familiar with the KJV. Psalm 18:26 is the most unfamiliar example to be found in the entire Psalter. In the few other examples that could be cited of especially archaic words, one could simply learn about fifteen new vocabulary words, or one could consult the following glossary.¹⁷

Glossary of the 1650 Psalter
Compiled from *Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary* (Jamieson) and the *Old English Dictionary* (OED)

Amain—At full force; greatly, or exceedingly (OED)
Betimes—Used in the English sense as in “early.” Not the Scottish sense of “occasionally.” (OED; Jamieson)
Conies—As used in the OT, a small pachyderm living in caves and rock clefts in Palestine (OED)
Flout—Jeer, mock, scorn, show contempt (OED)
Froward—Evilly disposed toward (OED)
Garners—Granary or store house (OED)
Gins—Snare, net, or trap (OED)
Indite—Write or compose, “to put into written words” (OED)
Kyth—Show; appear or manifest (Jamieson)
Pate—Head (OED)
Prevent—As in Psalm 119:148, “To act before, in anticipation of, or in preparation for (a future event, or a point of time, esp. the time fixed for the act).” As in Psalm 18:18, “To meet with welcome or succour; to meet with hostility or opposition, to confront.” (OED)
Reins—The seat of the feelings or affections (OED)
Sith—Since (OED)
Tentation—Temptation, often with meaning of “experimental trial” (OED)

Thrall—Captivity, bondage, servitude (OED)
Wight—Man
Wonted—Customary, usual (OED)
Wot—Know (OED)

Those four things appeared to this reviewer to be the main peculiarities of the Scottish Metrical Version. With a little practice, those four peculiarities are very easily navigated. I could imagine that, with continued use, one would get to a point that he would not even notice these things as peculiarities anymore.

Learning the Scottish Metrical Version

A congregation that has never used the Scottish Metrical Version could not only learn to sing the SMV, but it could also grow to love the SMV. The congregation would not be familiar or comfortable with the SMV overnight, but with some instruction and some practice, a congregation could look forward with eager anticipation to singing the SMV.

The key to a congregation's learning the SMV is understanding. When a congregation understands the principle behind the SMV—faithful metrical translation—the SMV will commend itself to the congregation. When a congregation understands the principles behind psalter paraphrases, a congregation will find those paraphrases wanting. A congregation's use of the SMV will not be a matter of compulsion or imposition but a matter of her grateful and willing worship of Christ, by the operation of Christ's word and Spirit, in a faithful translation of the psalms that she can sing. For a congregation to come to that point of understanding, she must be taught.

What follow are the undersigned's suggestions for introducing the SMV into a congregation. These suggestions are not the only way to do it. Perhaps they are not even the best way to do it. In making these suggestions I have more or less tried to follow Calvin's practice of introducing congregational psalm singing in Geneva.¹⁸

¹⁷ As found at <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/language-of-scottish-psalter.66870/>, slightly edited for publication in *Reformed Pavilion*.

¹⁸ See Andrew Lanning, “Introduction to John Calvin's Preface to the Genevan Psalter,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 8 (June 3, 2023): 26–32.

First, a congregation should learn the Scottish Metrical Version together as much as possible. Members will inevitably come to their convictions about the SMV at different paces. Some members will be ready to sing the SMV yesterday, while others will not be sure that they ever want to give up their psalter paraphrase for the SMV. Let those who are ready now not leave the others behind; let those who are not ready yet not hold the others back. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3–4).

How can a congregation learn the SMV together? Perhaps the best way is through regular midweek meetings arranged by the council. In those meetings the principles behind the SMV could be explained and compared with the principles behind paraphrasing. In this way the congregation could all be of the same mind as to the reasons that it would even consider the SMV. In these same meetings the congregation could sing the SMV. In this way the people of the congregation could learn together how to navigate the peculiarities of the SMV and see for themselves what it is like to sing the SMV. They could also observe firsthand the principle of faithful metrical translation. This would also prepare the congregation to sing certain psalms from the SMV in the worship services if and when a congregation would decide to sing from the SMV in worship.

Perhaps learning the SMV in midweek meetings adds an unnecessary step for a congregation. After all, in Calvin’s Geneva the congregation would practice the psalms for that Sunday’s worship privately in their homes and then sing them together in the worship. However, using a midweek meeting might make the transition to a new psalter less jarring and would help keep the congregation united in their purpose and in their expectations.

A midweek meeting would also allow the congregation to implement the SMV a few

psalms at a time, rather than all at once. The congregation could move along together as far as they have come together, without leaving some members behind and without dragging other members back. The congregation would sing during its midweek meeting with the knowledge that it was learning those psalms together to sing in worship on a coming Sunday.

Second, the children of the congregation can be an immense help to the adults of the congregation in learning to sing the Scottish Metrical Version. The children have ample opportunity to learn and sing the SMV in school. In Pavilion Christian School, for example, the children have sung through the psalms during Friday chapels since the beginning of the year. In Calvin’s Geneva the children would learn to sing the psalms in school and then help their congregations sing the psalms in church. The children were singing what was already familiar to them, so that those for whom the psalm was not yet familiar could follow the children’s lead. What a marvelous example of the office of all believer, as the children readily and cheerfully employed their gifts “for the advantage and salvation of other members” (Lord’s Day 21, Q&A 55). In our own context the children could learn the psalm from the SMV throughout the week in school so that they could help their families and their congregation sing it on Sunday. Calvin’s method in Geneva could work yet today for congregations in America and elsewhere.

This manner of proceeding seemed specially good to us, that children, who beforehand have practised some modest church song, sing in a loud distinct voice, the people listening with all attention and following heartily what is sung with the mouth, till all become accustomed to sing communally.¹⁹

Conclusion

The principle upon which the Scottish Metrical Version rests is its greatest strength. The more familiar that a congregation becomes with the

¹⁹ J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 53–54.

principle undergirding the Scottish Metrical Version, the more the SMV will commend itself for use by that congregation in its worship. Especially for a congregation that is already committed to the King James Version of the Bible because of the KJV's faithfulness in translation, it is no great leap in principle for that congregation to commit to the Scottish Metrical Version because of the SMV's faithfulness in translation.

What is no great leap in principle may nevertheless be a great emotional leap for a congregation. It is no small thing for a congregation to change its psalter. However, understanding is the key. A congregation that is still mostly unfamiliar with the SMV's principles could become familiar with them relatively quickly. And a congregation that is not yet familiar with the experience of singing the SMV could become familiar

with it relatively quickly as well. Through instruction and practice in the manner outlined above, a congregation could know before long whether it could and should adopt the SMV for its congregational worship.

The psalms are a great gift of God to his church, by which the church may sing with the sweet psalmist of Israel the praises that God himself has ordained. For those who love the psalms and who desire to sing the psalms that God has given, the Scottish Metrical Version is highly recommended.

Praise ye the Lord: unto him sing
A new song, and his praise
In the assembly of his saints
In sweet psalms do you raise.
—Psalm 149:1 (SMV)

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article XLVII. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

You will recall that the last article of ours approached the question of the so-called Millennium and the explanation of Rev. 20:1–10. We then stated that we did not believe in a millennium in any sense of the word. We warned, however, that the controversy that arose in our church thru the publication of *Maranatha* does not deal with the question of the millennium, but with some of the fundamental teachings of Pre-millennarians, namely with their denial of the kingship of Christ over the Church, and with their separation of Israel and the people of God in the New Dispensation.

I must make one more practical remark, before I turn to the question of the millenium as such. I am well aware of the fact that my task is

to write doctrine, and that what I am saying now is not strictly doctrinal in character. But who can write doctrine entirely in the abstract, without making any practical applications whatsoever? Especially since the question of pre-millennialism is at present one that creates some interest, that even causes some disturbance in our little church, I cannot refrain from becoming practical and from making an occasional excursion.

The remark I must make is this, that one who propagates teachings in disharmony with the Reformed standards is in no wise persecuted or wronged, becomes in no sense of the word a martyr, if he is kindly asked to retract his unreformed teachings or to leave the church. Nor is

he in any wise an object of persecution, if refusing to leave the church on his own account and yet insisting to spread his doctrines he is simply expelled and forced to look for a field of labor elsewhere. It is not superfluous that the attention of our people be called to this simple fact also. The idea has been expressed that to expel from the church those that teach doctrines contrary to our reformed faith is equivalent to religious persecution, and that such a teacher of unreformed, or let me rather say, anti-reformed principles becomes a martyr. The act of synod 1918 regarding Maranatha has been called mockingly “an heretic trial”; and has been bitterly denounced as a manifestation of religious intolerance and an act of persecution. Yet, any sane reformed mind will immediately admit that this is not the case. Persecution is the attempt to make it impossible by main force that anyone serve his God and confess his faith according to his convictions. It is to inflict suffering upon anyone, because of his avowed religious convictions. And when anyone suffers in any manner because of his faith in Christ he becomes a martyr. If any premillennialist would suffer in any way because he is of millennial convictions he surely would be a martyr. And if we would mean to trouble any brother in Christ because he was not reformed, because he was a premillennialist, we certainly would be guilty of religious intolerance and persecution.

But this is not the case!

Let us have the fact clearly before our minds, that no one is troubled by the reformed church because he is of Premillennial convictions. On the contrary, I think there are many reasons why we may have a high regard for the brethren in Christ that call themselves Pre’s. Their general orthodoxy, their stand for the fundamental truths of Christianity, their open confession of total depravity, of the truth of atonement, of their faith in Christ, their maintenance of the line of distinction between the church and the world, — all these are fine and refreshing in their influence in a time of rather general apostasy and humanism. And rather than persecute

the premillennial brother in Christ we heartily extend the hand of Christian fellowship. There is no spirit of persecution within us whatsoever.

And, therefore, the premillennialist as such is not troubled at all. As far as we are concerned any millennialist can serve his God and profess his faith without being troubled whatsoever. But when he claims to have the right to propagate his teachings as an officially ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, when a man is in disharmony with the confession he professes to be his own, when he becomes inconsistent, not to call it dishonest, then he surely becomes an object of simple church discipline. For with all the general agreement between the Premillennarian and the Reformed Christian, there is also an important difference between them. There are some principles the Reformed Christian loves while the Premillennarian denounces them as false. And these two principles have been pointed out by the synod of 1918. The Reformed Standards maintain the actual kingship of Christ over his church, the premillennarian confession cannot accept it; the Reformed Standards maintain the essential unity of Israel and the church, the continuity of the old and the new dispensation; the premillennarian faith cannot admit this. Their differences are fundamental. And for that reason, a man cannot be reformed and premillennial at the same time. And for that reason it is simply a matter of honesty for a true premillennialist to sever his connection with a church of reformed principles and openly express his conviction that he disagrees with the standards of the church in these fundamental aspects. And, once more, for that same reason, it is no matter of religious persecution if the church guards her own principles and refuses to permit the propagation of positively anti-reformed ideas within her domain.

Once more then, not the premillennialist is troubled in any way. As long as he only is content to remain outside of our reformed church. But the millennialist that insists upon remaining with us and what is more, insists upon making

propaganda for positively anti-reformed principles, that premillennialist causes trouble to himself because of his double-hearted position.

Now let us return to the question of the millennium proper. It is, as is generally admitted, chiefly a question of the correct exegesis of Rev. 20:1–10. And we hope to show that no doctrine of any millennium at all can be based on that passage. But before we enter into the explanation of these verses we wish to mention some other reasons why we cannot accept the view that before the final consummation of this world Christ shall have a glorious reign on earth lasting ten centuries. As we undoubtedly know, by the millennium (taken now in the premillennial sense of the word) is meant a thousand years of glorious Christ-reign upon earth. It is true, there is no agreement as to the details of this doctrine among its adherents, but a few general features of it may safely be stated. In the first place, according to this view, Christ is to reign with his N.T. people, the Church, over Israel in the first place, but also over the nations of the world, for a thousand years. Whether Christ will live in Jerusalem at that time or whether He will reign from heaven, or again, whether He will be in the air, is a question concerning which there is no agreement, but this is of less importance. Christ shall reign. He shall reign with his church, the Bride. He shall reign over His people Israel in the literal sense. And also the nations of the world shall be subjected unto Him. It shall be a period of peace and glory and happiness and bliss for all the world; not only His own people, but also the nations of the world shall participate in its blessings; not only men, but also the animal world shall receive the blessings of this Christ-reign, yea, all creation shall rejoice and be glorious during this period of a thousand years. This period shall commence and be inaugurated by the destruction of Antichrist and the binding of satan, particularly the latter. For during a period of a thousand years the devil

shall be bound so that he will be able to deceive men no more. And thru this binding of the devil especially all the world enjoys a period of peace.

Now, it has correctly been questioned whether the binding of the devil would actually have so much influence that all the earth of a sudden were changed into a sort of paradise, and even the unregenerated would subject themselves to Christ. Superficially considered it would seem rather acceptable perhaps that we attribute all the misery and war, all the sin and iniquity actually committed by man to the influence of the devil, so that apart from his evil influence there might be peace and harmony and bliss in the earth. But after all, we know better. We are well aware of the fact that sin is rooted in our very hearts, that, indeed, the evil one exerts a tremendous influence upon us, but that the sinfulness of our nature would reveal itself just the same if satan, if all the devils in hell were bound forever, so that they could not deceive us. We must not think too highly of ourselves even apart from the influence of the devil. And we ought not to entertain too lofty expectations of a period even of a thousand years during which the devil should be bound. Sin and death would reign just as well without him, as under his seducing power.

In the second place, it may be called strange, indeed, that outside of Rev. 20:1–10, a highly symbolic passage, Scripture never has discovered the millennium as a thousand years of reign with Christ. I am well aware that the premillennialist finds that millennium in many passages, but even he must admit that he would never have discovered the millennium as such were it not for Rev. 20:1–10. This is strange. Many a time we read about the Second Advent, the judgment of the righteous and the wicked, the resurrection of the dead, the tribulation of God's people, the signs of Christ's coming. But never do we have any reference to a millennium. We would expect more or less clear references to it. Neither Jesus nor Paul or Peter and John seem to have been aware of the coming of a millennium. In Matt. 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 we have direct discourses of the Lord on

the subject of His second advent. He speaks of the signs of His coming, of the suffering His people will have to endure for His name's sake, of wars and rumors of wars, of the shaking up of the heavens, of the gathering in of the elect, but not a word of a millennium. The same may be said of the discourses of the apostle Paul. In I Cor. 15 we have his beautiful chapter on the resurrection of the dead, but nothing suggests that the resurrection of the righteous and that of the wicked shall be a thousand years apart. Nothing that suggests a millennium. In II Thess. 2:1–12 we have the well-known passage on the Second Advent, in which Paul discusses the man of sin, the son of perdition that will be destroyed by the power of Christ's appearance. But nothing that makes us think of a millennium. We rather receive the impression that the appearance of Christ constitutes the end of all things. I Thess. 4:13–18 discusses the order of the resurrection relative to the rapture of the saints that will live at Christ's coming. But also there we find no trace of a suggestion that the apostle expected any such thing as a thousand years' reign of Christ with His saints on earth.

Now, this is a fact of great significance. Not as if we would maintain that the millennium could not be plainly revealed in Rev. 20 because it was never mentioned in other parts of Scripture. Nevertheless, in the first place, it might be expected that such an important doctrine would have been mentioned in other parts of the N.T., especially in the passages that speak of the

second coming of Christ. And in the second place, it must be admitted by all that Rev. 20:1–20 is not one of the simplest, plainest, most easily comprehended passages of Holy Writ, and it is a safe rule that the plainer passages of the Bible ought to serve as a guide in the interpretation of the more difficult ones. Never should we proceed from such a passage as Rev. 20 in order to explain all Scripture in its light. We are, therefore, from the outset, cautioned to be careful. All the more so, since outside of this one passage there are, indeed, many passages that would seem to contradict rather strongly the entire theory of a millennium. I refer to such passages as the parable of The Tares Among the Wheat. In it Jesus simply teaches that the wicked and the good must be allowed to exist side by side in the outward form of the kingdom, at least in as far as the former appear like the latter, till at the end of time Christ shall come to separate them and send the wicked to the place of everlasting punishment. Matt. 13:24–30, 36–42. And the same truth is taught in the parable of The Dragnet. The separation of the good and the bad appears as an act of one moment, not as two separate events with a thousand years intervening. And, therefore, it is of great significance, that neither Jesus nor Paul ever speak of a millennium.

And the passage of Rev. 20 is admittedly a difficult one.

—Holland, Mich.

