

Musical Terms*

Instructions on orchestration, which tune to use to perform a psalm, the appropriate tempo, as well as performance markings or rubrics such as pauses, breath marks and the use of crescendo and decrescendo modulations.

Alamoth: (Ps.46) musicians are to play their harps “according to Alamoth”, which may refer to a high-pitched voice or to playing on the upper register of the instrument.

Death of the Son: (Ps.9) = “strength of youth”, this is an incipit or set of cue words for a tune now lost.

Do not Destroy: (Ps.57-59, 75) likely the opening words of a text or song title. It may also serve as a shorthand means of forbidding the destruction or removal of an inscription or text.

Doe of the Morning: (Ps.22) cue given to the director of the psalm to perform it according to a popular tune, “the doe of the morning”. It would be a common practice to set new words to an old, familiar tune.

Dove on Distant Oaks: (Ps.56) cue for a song title and tune for the performance of this psalm.

Flutes: (Ps.5) referring to lamentation-pipes, may also be the cue for the tune of the psalm.

Gittith: (Ps.8, 81, 84) a musical instrument, also possible that it is a cue word signifying a rhythm, a song or a dance patterned after the work of grape treaders in the winepress (Hebrew word *gat*)

Higgaion: (Ps:16) orchestration cue to the musicians. It has the meaning “utterance” or “musings” and thus may indicate a type of glisaando or fluttering sound, perhaps by string accompaniment.

Jeduthun: (Ps.39, 62, 77) reference to that person or possibly to a style of performance attributed to him.

Lily of the Covenant: (Ps. 60, 80) cue word for song title whose tune is now unknown

Mahalath: (Ps.53) a type of flue or pipe used in celebratory processions. Since it can also be translated as “sickness” it is possible that the instrument was used in healing rituals.

Mahalath Leannoth: (Ps.88) antiphonal line of music for more than one instrument or alternating chanted and instrumental lines.

Petition: (Ps.38, 70) reference to a grain offering accompanied by frankincense, thus it may refer to a public ritual including both an offering and a petition for God's aid.

Selah: (Ps.3, 4, 7, 9, 20-21, 24, 32...) means "interlude", indicating a break in the text or performance. It is possible that it is a cue for the choir to repeat a litany or affirmation of a statement in the psalm or for a particular instrument.

Sheminith: (Ps.6, 12) "eight-stringed instrument", the reference here is either to the use of this device or possibly to the use of the eight strings.

Shiggaion: (Ps.7) "to howl or lament"

Tune of Lilies: (Ps.45, 69) an incipit or set of cue words for a tune now unknown. It may also be an instruction to accompany the song with a lily-shaped instrument.

* taken from the Bible Background Commentary