

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #14:
OBSERVATIONS ON SOME OF OUR SONGS, PART TWO
By John Temples

Singing is a vital part of our worship. We spend as much time singing as we do preaching in most worship services. And rightly so, for God commands such. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Notice that we are to “teach and admonish one another” in our singing. That tells us two important things: first, singing is a “one another” activity. It is to be done by all, not just a select few or a choir. Second, one purpose of our singing is to instruct each other in God’s truth. Therefore, our songs should be Scriptural--true to the Book. It is just as wrong to sing error as it is to preach error!

Hence, some comments (both pro and con) are in order regarding some of the songs in our books.

“BREAK THOU THE BREAD OF LIFE”

This song is often sung as a communion song, but that is not its subject--the Bible, the word of truth, is its subject. This song is a prayer for the Lord to feed us with His word just as He fed the multitudes with physical bread. It begins, “Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord to me, **as** Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea.” The “bread of life” is the truth, the word of God--not the communion bread. The second verse makes that apparent: “Bless thou *the truth*, dear Lord to me, as Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee.”

And another thing: in verse 1, it says, “*Beyond the sacred page* I seek thee, Lord.” I don’t know what the writer had in mind here, but this implies that there is something other than the Bible--information in addition to the Bible--that we need to be complete in Jesus. However, Peter said that God has “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Because of this questionable

wording, some of our hymnal editors have amended this part of the song to read “*within* the sacred page I seek thee, Lord.”

“JESUS IS COMING SOON”

In some of our song books, this song has only two verses. In others, there is a second (middle) verse. Why is the middle verse left out of some books? Because its wording is VERY unscriptural. It reads, “Love of so many cold, losing their homes of gold, this in God’s word is told, evils abound; *when these signs come to pass, nearing the end at last*, it will come very fast, trumpets will sound.”

Of course, the problem is that there will be no signs of Christ’s second coming. “But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36). Jesus goes on to compare his coming to the arrival of the Flood--there was no warning in Noah’s day, and there will be none in ours.

I personally refrain from singing verse 2 because of this.

“HALLELUJAH, PRAISE JEHOVAH”

This is a majestic hymn, taken from Psalms 148 in the KJV. I mention this song only because of the word “dragons” in verse 2: “O praise Jehovah, all ye floods, ye dragons all.” Some people have said the Bible text is in error here, because dragons were mythical creatures that never existed.

Dr. Henry Morris defends this wording in his commentary on Genesis 1:21: “The frequent references to dragons in the Bible, as well as in the early records and traditions of most of the nations of antiquity, certainly cannot be shrugged off as mere fairy tales. Most probably they represent memories of dinosaurs handed down by tribal ancestors who encountered them before they became extinct.” (Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1976: page 69.)

Here is another explanation: “Today, we associate dragons with storybook fare and medieval folklore. There are many mentions of “dragons” in the Old

Testament (e.g., Psalm 148:7; Isaiah 43:20; Micah 1:8), mostly in the KJV. As we mention in our article on dinosaurs, the obscure Hebrew word *tanniyn* indicates some kind of very large or hideous creature. This animal is mentioned 18 times in the Old Testament as both a land and sea dweller. Other versions translate it variously as ‘great sea creature’ or (in other contexts) ‘wolves’ or ‘jackals.’ It is most likely a general term for undesirable creatures, possibly a reference to dinosaurs and other now-extinct reptilian creatures.”

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/mythological-creatures-Bible.html>)

Our modern word *dinosaur*, meaning “large lizard-like beast,” was not coined until the 1800s. What word did people use to describe these creatures before that? Dragons! So Psalms 148 is vindicated, and so is the wording of this beautiful song.

“I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED”

This song says, “I know not why God’s wondrous grace to me He hath made known, nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for His own. But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.”

A great idea for a song, but the writer strays from the truth in verse 2: “I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin....”

A couple of points to make: First, we DO know how the Spirit moves to convince men of sin: it is through the Bible, the word of God. Jesus said in John 16:8, “And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” And Paul said he would not have known covetousness to be a sin unless the law had said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7).

Also, the way verse 2 is written creates a conflict or contradiction. The first line of the verse says we do not know how the Spirit moves to convict men of sin. However, the second line says that we DO know--it says, “revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in Him.” In some of our songbooks, verse 2 has been

amended to read, "I know just how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin." This removes the contradiction, but it doesn't fit the theme of the song.

"MY GOD AND I"

This song starts, "My God and I go in the fields together, we walk and talk as good friends should and do; we clasp our hands, our voices ring with laughter." Is it just me, or is this getting too familiar with God--bringing Him down to the level of a "buddy" or "pal"?

We need to be very careful not to trivialize or humanize God. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few."

God was Abraham's friend, but He was not Abraham's buddy. Let us resist the urge to bring God down to our level; let us, as did Abraham and all the other great people of old, keep a respectful distance from God.

"NIGHT WITH EBON PINION"

This is a haunting and beautiful song, and I have no criticism of it. I mention it because I would bet that not one Christian out of a hundred knows what "ebon pinion" means.

Ebon is a poetic word meaning "dark or black." A *pinion* is a wing, as of a bird. Verse 1 says, "Night with ebon pinion brooded o'er the vale." This is simply poetspeak meaning "Night hovered over the valley like a bird with dark wings."

"WONDERFUL LOVE OF JESUS"

Here we have the same situation as with "Night With Ebon Pinion"--many are puzzled by the wording "In vain in high and holy lays, my soul her grateful voice would raise; for who can sing the worthy praise of the wonderful love of Jesus?"

What does “in vain in high and holy lays” mean? “Lay” is usually a verb, but it does have a noun meaning. A lay (noun) is a song of praise. So the writer is saying, “It’s impossible to write or sing a song (a lay) that would adequately praise Jesus.”

“WE BOW DOWN”

This song by Twila Paris is a favorite of our young people. But there are two problems with it in my view.

The first problem is this repeated refrain: “You are Lord of creation and Lord of my life, Lord of the land and the sea; You were Lord of the heavens before there was time; **and Lord of all Lords You will be.**” The second verse says, “and **King of all Kings You will be.**” These words reflect the erroneous premillennial idea that Jesus does not yet have a kingdom; He is yet to become “Lord of Lords and King of Kings.” But Revelation 17:14 says, “He **is** [now] Lord of lords and King of kings.” 1 Timothy 6:15 says the same.

The second problem relates to the first. The third verse says, “We bow down and we crown You the King” (this is repeated three times). This may sound picky, but WE do not crown Jesus as King--God does! (And He already has.)

In Part 3 next week, I’ll share with you my pick for the worst song in our book.
--John Temples