

The National Anthem of the Kingdom of God

Each summer in the Royal Albert Hall in London, England, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus team up with the classical music world's finest instrumental and vocal soloists for a remarkable eight week series of daily performances, called "The Promenade Concerts" – affectionately known as "The Proms."

The final concert of this series – "The Last Night of the Proms" – is always something very special to British classical music lovers. The audience dresses in patriotic costumes with bowler hats, suits, dresses, etc. adorned with the British flag – the Union Jack.

During the first half of the concert, the audience is deceptively quiet and attentive – which, of course, is very right and proper behaviour for most classical music concerts. But in the second half, they are encouraged to let their nationalistic juices flow freely as they join the huge choir in performances of rousing, patriotic, nationalistic songs such as:

- Sir Hubert Parry's "Jerusalem" which sets to rousing music the words from William Blake's poem, "And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's mountains green?"
- Sir Edward Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March, Number 1 which concludes with A.C. Benson's tears-inducing poem, "Land of Hope and Glory."
- A medley of traditional Sea Songs arranged by Sir Henry Wood, featuring the well-known patriotic song, "Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves"

The concert concludes with a raising of the rafters with the singing of the British national anthem, "God save the Queen."

In this article, I would like to compare the patriotic, nationalistic songs of modern times and of Bible times with some other biblical songs, one of which might well be the National Anthem of the Kingdom of God.

Nationalistic songs of modern times

Although these patriotic British Songs, when they are sung at the Last Night of the Proms, are sung somewhat tongue-in-cheek and are laced with a good deal of humour, the nationalistic pride of the singers really does shine through. Every year, the words of these anthems and the enthusiastic voices of the singers never fail to bring a lump to my throat and a tear to my eye.

As I was doing some research for this article, I looked up the words to the national anthems of many of the countries where we have church members:

- Trinidad & Tobago
- South Africa
- The Netherlands
- France
- Australia
- Zambia
- Namibia
- The Philippines
- Germany
- The U.S.A.
- Canada

It would be nice if we had space here to include recordings of these rousing anthems; or even to just to list their words. But unfortunately, we do not. However, I found two interesting threads that are common to the words of many of these anthems. One is that many of them have militaristic undertones, and the second is that many of them call on God. Let us take a quick look at these two common threads:

Militaristic undertones

Most of these militaristic undertones are quite low-key. One example is the Zambian anthem which declares that our Zambian friends are “Victors in the struggle for the right; we have won freedom's fight.”

Another is in our own Canadian national anthem which proudly concludes, “O Canada, We stand on guard for thee.”

There are others, like the French “Marseillaise” which are (with apologies to our French brethren) out-and-out ferocious!

**To arms, oh citizens!
Form up in crowded ranks!
March on, March on!
And drench our fields
With their tainted blood!**

With that, let us move on to our second common thread:

Calling on God

Many national anthems call on God, and ask Him for His protection, victory or might. But even here, we perceive militaristic undertones!

Many of these anthems were composed during eras when the citizens and leaders of the countries had at least some more fear and respect for God than ours do today.

Yes. The words of our anthems are grand, and their performances are wonderful, magnificent and stirring. But in calling on God, we may be sure that most modern singers lack true sincerity when they sing them. Of course they must! At least for the time-being, they do not know God! They may call on Him in the words of their anthems; but they refuse to honour and obey Him. The prophet Ezekiel was inspired to foresee this trait in the people of Israel – both ancient and modern:

Ezekiel 33:

31: So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain.

32: And, lo, you are unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not.

Nationalistic songs of Bible times

Like their modern descendants, the ancient Israelites were very proud of their nation, and they often expressed their pride in song. In Exodus chapter 15, Moses led the Israelites in a marvellous song of thanksgiving and praise to God after He had brought them through the Red Sea. For now, let us just read two of the song's eighteen verses:

Exodus 15:

- 1: Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spoke, saying, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea.**
- 2: The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.**

Here we see the same ingredients as in our modern national anthems: God and war. The difference, though, is that in this case, it was God who did all the necessary fighting.

Shortly after the singing of Moses' song, later in the same chapter, we read of another song (and a dance) by his sister Miriam and a choir of Israelite women, in which they echo Moses' words (Exodus 15:20-21).

Other scriptures contain both happy nationalistic songs, and more serious ones. Here is one example of the serious songs.

Just before Moses went up Mount Nebo to die, after giving his final instructions to the children of Israel, he sang a duet with Joshua. It was a very long song which was actually written by God and, far from being joyous, it contained some serious, dire warnings to Israel:

Deuteronomy 31:

- 19: Now therefore write this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel...**

Verse 21: And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

22: Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel...

Verse 30: and Moses spoke in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.

This second Song of Moses is 43 verses long! – way too long for us to reproduce here. It appears that God and the Israelites liked long songs!

Another example of a long patriotic song is the thirty-verse Song of Deborah, in which she gives thanks to God for the deliverance of Israel from the Canaanites. When you have time, you can read it in chapter 5 of the book of Judges.

As Moses sang a long song just before his death, so shortly before David's death, after God had delivered him from various enemies, David sang a long, inspiring, fifty-verse song to God. You can read its words in II Samuel, chapter 23.

From our regular, weekly hymn-singing, we all know that the book of Psalms is filled with marvellous songs – some written by David – some written by others. Many of them are both patriotic for physical and spiritual Israel and filled with praise for God.

At the times in which the Psalms were composed, the Israelites' nationalism and praise of God were considered to be one and the same thing. As Old Testament Israel was – at least for part of its history – making *some* attempt at being the people of God, its nationalism and patriotism was inseparable from God's tabernacle and, later, His temple.

Singing and instrumental music were both very important in God's house. Whole families of musically-talented Levites were set apart just for these responsibilities:

I Chronicles 25:

6: All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman.

7: So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight.

There were 288 temple musicians! That is a pretty good sized orchestra and chorus, even by modern standards!

After Judah's return from exile in Babylon, the restorers of the temple thought it important also to re-establish the musical services. We can read of this in the twelfth chapter of the book of Nehemiah.

So we see that the people of Israel – both ancient and modern – have continued singing their proud anthems and nationalistic songs throughout the centuries. But God warns us that, because of our nations' sins, a time is coming when He will put a stop to the singing of our proud songs and anthems:

Ezekiel 26:13:

And I will cause the noise of your songs to cease; and the sound of your harps shall be no more heard.

Note the term “your songs.” Many of the patriotic songs of Israel were not – and are not – God's songs.

Through the prophet Amos, God tells our nations:

- **Take away from me the noise of your songs (5:23)**
- **The songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day (8:3)**
- **I'll turn your songs into lamentation (8:10)**

God's new songs

But happily, that dreadful, music-less era will be very short-lived. As God restores the people of Israel to their homeland, new songs of national joy will be composed and sung:

Isaiah 35:10:

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The joyful and soothing words of these new anthems will relegate the old vainglorious, war-like topics to where they belong – firmly in the past! The accent will no longer be on human military strength. Rather, the songs will encourage and emphasize trust in the might of God, His salvation and righteousness, His truth and peace.

When that time comes... the wonderful time that the people of God's church anticipate and celebrate each year at the Feast of Tabernacles – that time when war will finally be a thing of the past (except, of course, for Satan's final attempts at the end of the Millennium) – the newly-Spirit-born children of God will give a "repeat performance" of one of the Songs of Moses:

Revelation 15:

3: And they *{those who have victory over the Beast}* sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvellous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, you King of saints.

4: Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you only are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before you; for your judgments are made manifest."

Are you perhaps worried that you may not have a good enough singing voice for that performance? Don't worry. I'm sure that God will give you one! The scriptures indicate that, at Christ's return, all of us will be specially chosen and given the ability to be part of a very elite chorale.

But *which* “Song of Moses” will we sing then? Will we sing the joyous one from Exodus 15? Or his song of dire warning from Deuteronomy 31? I would think that, in all probability, it would be the first one – the joyous one. As God gave ancient Israel a great, miraculous victory over Egypt’s might, so He will give spiritual Israel an even greater, an even more miraculous victory – this time, over the Beast and the dragon which empowers it.

But John’s God-inspired vision tells us that, in addition to the song of Moses, we will also sing the “Song of the Lamb.” As we have seen, God tells us the *words* of this *Song of the Lamb*; but just imagine how incomparably fabulous the *music* will be! We may wonder if both of these songs will be sung together – with different words, yes, but both in total harmony with one another – like a vast and magnificent, multi-part fugue by Johannes Sebastian Bach.

Now, what about God’s “new song”? – or rather, new songs? There are seven mentions of “new songs” in the Old Testament. But these two songs mentioned in the book of Revelation appear to be extra-special ones:

Revelation 5:

9: And they sang a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10: And have made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

These words remind one of the glorious choruses in the closing pages of Handel’s “Messiah.” Here is the second of God’s new songs:

Revelation 14:3:

And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

This one seems to be a different “new song” to the other one. Revelation 5 quotes the words to its new song. But in this one in Revelation 14, only the elite choir of the “144,000 redeemed” may learn its words and music.

Perhaps one of these new songs will be the official National Anthem of the Kingdom of God! In that day, God's National Anthem will not be sung out of haughty, militaristic nationalism. Rather, it will be sung in true worship and honour to the great God and to His Firstborn Son, Jesus Christ.

If it really is a “National” Anthem, what will the “Nation” be? Yes, *physical* Israel is to be restored. But the foremost “nation” will be *spiritual* Israel – which will be made up of the Family of God – the very Kingdom of God!

It is inspiring for us to use our God-given imaginations in a proper way, and to speculate on subjects such as this. Perhaps God will choose the very best singers from among all His holy angels. Perhaps, like the organizers of The Proms, He will team them up with the best singers and musicians of His human and resurrected children!

And, again, what might the words be to that National Anthem of the Kingdom of God? Will they be the words to the Song of the Lamb? Or one of God’s new songs? Or will they perhaps be similar to the wonderful songs of praise in “The Messiah” the words of which Handel took from various verses in the book of Revelation?:

Hallelujah! *{Praise God!}* For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah!

Still with the closing bars of Handel's "Messiah," we'll finish on these inspiring, exciting, and wonderful words:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing! And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him who sits on the throne {referring to God the Father!} and unto the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!"

So be it! Amen!

*John Plunkett
Building Bridges, The Church of God - Canada
Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada
December 5, 2010*