

The National Anthem of the Kingdom of God

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Each summer 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 two-month 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, all 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 behavior 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* beginning with the words, "And did those feet in ancient times walk upon England's mountains green?"; Sir Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance March, number 1" beginning with the words, "Land of hope and glory"; a medley of traditional sea songs arranged by Sir Henry Wood, featuring the well-known, "Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves, Britons never, never shall be slaves"; and the concert concludes with a raising of the rafters with the singing of the British national anthem "God Save the Queen."

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.

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 humor, the nationalistic pride of the singers really does shine through. 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 split sermon, I looked up the words to the national anthems of all the countries where we have CGG members:

- Trinidad & Tobago
- South Africa
- The Netherlands
- France
- Australia
- Zambia
- Namibia
- The Philippines
- Germany

- The United Kingdom
- The United States
- Canada

I would like to send greetings to all of those brethren around the world.

I wish I could read the words to those rousing anthems. But unfortunately, I cannot for lack of time. However, I found two interesting threads that are common to the words of many of these anthems. One of these threads is that many of them have militaristic undertones, and the second is that many of them call on God.

Most of the 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 Canadian national anthem which proudly concludes, "O Canada, We stand on guard for thee". There are others, like the French *Marseillaise* which are 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!"

The second thread is that many of these national anthems call on God, asking 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 these countries had at least some 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 do! 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 33:31-32 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. 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.

Like their modern descendants, the ancient Israelites were very proud of their nation, and they often expressed their pride in song.

In Exodus 15, Moses led the Israelites in a marvelous song of thanksgiving and praise to God after He had brought them through the Red Sea.

Exodus 15:1-2 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and its rider has He thrown into the

sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation: He is my God, and I will praise Him; 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. The scriptures contain both happy nationalistic songs, and more serious ones.

There is an example of one of the serious songs when 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, 21-22, 30 Now therefore write down this song for yourselves, 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. . . . Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles are have come upon them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them into the land of which I swore to give them. Therefore Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel . . . Then Moses spoke in the hearing 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 read now. It appears that God and the Israelites liked long songs!

Another example of a long song is the 30-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 Judges 5.

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, 50-verse song to God. You can read its words in II Samuel 23.

From our regular, weekly hymn-singing, we all know that the book of Psalms is filled with marvelous songs—some written by David, some written by others. Many of them are both patriotic for Israel and filled with praise for God. At the time 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 the worship in the 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 musical worship.

I Chronicles 25:6-7 All these were under the direction of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the music of the house of the Lord, Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight.

There were two hundred and eighty-eight temple musicians! That is a pretty good-sized orchestra and chorus, even by modern standards!

After Judah returned 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 Nehemiah 12.

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 warned them, and He warns us today, that there is a time coming when He will put a stop to the singing. He will put a stop to the singing of our proud songs and anthems because of the grievous sins of our nations.

Ezekiel 26:13 I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be no more heard.

Note the term "your songs." Because of the sins of Israel these are not God's songs any more. Our national anthems are not God's songs any more. Through the prophet Amos, God tells our nations, "Take away from Me the noise of your songs", and "I will turn your songs into lamentation".

Israel will go through an era of no music. But thankfully that dreadful, non-musical 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 singing, with everlasting joy on 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, but rather will encourage and emphasize trust in the might of God, God's salvation, righteousness, truth, and peace.

That is the wonderful time that the people of God's church are anticipating and celebrating this week. That time when war will finally almost be a thing of the past (except, of course, for Satan's final attempts at the end of the Millennium). At that time, the newly Spirit-born children

of God will give a "repeat performance" of one of the songs of Moses:

Revelation 15:3-4 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, [Here come the words to the song of the Lamb] "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints. Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For you alone are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before You; for Your judgments are made manifest."

Perhaps you worry that you do not have a good singing voice for that performance? Do not worry. I am sure 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? Will we sing the joyous one from Exodus 15 or his song of dire warning from Deuteronomy 31? It might be both. I think probably 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 vision tells us that, in addition to the song of Moses, we will also sing the "song of the Lamb". God tells us the words of this song; and just imagine how incomparably fabulous the music will be! We may wonder if both of these songs will be sung together—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 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 5:9-10 And they sang a new song, saying, [Here come the words of the new song] "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; 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 living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand, who 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, but will rather 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. We cannot visualize how absolutely fantastic this is going to be. 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 it be the song of Moses, will it be the words to the song of the Lamb, or will it be one of God's new songs, or will it perhaps be something similar to one of the wonderful songs of praise that we listen to in Handel's *Messiah*. All of the last pages of Handel's *Messiah* are quoted from various scriptures 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* please turn to Revelation 5, and we will finish on these inspiring, exciting, and wonderful words:

Revelation 5:12-14 Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor 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 honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne [That is God the Father], and unto the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!"

So be it! Amen!