

Hidden Hills *Missionary* Baptist Herald

"Preaching Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and risen to a condemned world"



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SONGS & SINGING

By F. Leon King



Introduction. In the past years, this writer has heard a great deal about singing, but most of what has been said is merely the opinions and preferences of men. We all have preferences of music and preferences in singing.

The New Testament, which is our only and sufficient rule of faith and practice, has some things to tell us about songs and singing. Later, in this article, the writer will observe what is written on this subject. Undoubtedly, the first century churches had singing in their meetings, but we are not told expressly in the Holy Scriptures about exactly how they did it. The writer is convinced that they sang, otherwise, they would not have been obedient to at least two verses which enjoined singing and making melody.

Some have said:

- "I don't agree with contemporary Christian music."
- "We like and sing contemporary Christian music."

- "We sing only Psalms."
- "We sing Psalms, but those adapted in the Psalter."
- "We use only 'Favorite Songs and Hymns,' the book our churches have used for more than a hundred years."
- "If it has a beat, it cannot be Christian music."
- "We can never sing Christian music accompanied by a guitar or any such instrument – pianos and organs are all that ought to be used."
- "We ought to have special music in our church services – that is, individuals or groups who sing while the others listen."
- "Church singing ought to be strictly congregational singing – no special music."
- "A church needs a choir."
- "We sing without the 'benefit' of musical instruments – that is, we sing our hymns with no instrumental accompaniment and sing them very slowly."

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After more than forty-one years as a preacher of the gospel and pastor of churches, the writer has seen and heard most of the different kinds and styles of singing. From a child, he has heard the songs of the churches and knows many of them very well. Most of the arguments we hear about singing and music are designed to discourage instead of encourage singing. Does everything go? Of course not! We need the Word of God and the wisdom of God to ascertain what is good and what is not. Since we do not have certain detailed specifics about songs and singing in the Holy Scriptures—the New Testament, let every man be persuaded in his own mind. Let us look at the definition of sing, sung, and sang.

Many speak of gathering for worship in a singing service and have employed those they have named “worship leaders.” Is singing worship? Not necessarily—and it is clear that a great deal of singing cannot properly be called wor-

ship. One truly worships when he submits himself to the providence and will of God. A good illustration of this is found in the book of Job. Upon hearing the messengers tell him that his wealth was gone and that all his children had been killed, *Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*” One’s acquiescence to the will and providential care of God is true worship. When one can say, in the midst of any happening and circumstance, “Even so, Father, as it seemeth good in thy sight,” he experiences worship. Worship may or may not be going on when one sings. How blessed is the one who sings to the Lord in holy and humble submission to His will!

Singing – Defined. Exactly what is singing? We all know what it is – or isn’t, do we not? Or do we? Webster defines singing as follows:

“SING, verb, intransitive, pret. sung, sang; pp. sung.

1. To utter sounds with various inflections of melodious modulations of voice, as fancy may dictate, or according to the notes of a song or tune. The noise of them that sing do I hear Ex. 32.

2. To utter sweet or melodious sounds, as birds. It is remarkable that the female of no species of birds ever sings. . . singing birds in silver cages hung.

3. To make a small shrill sound; as,

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the air sings in passing through a crevice. O'er his head the flying spear sung innocent, and spent its force in air.

4. To tell or relate something in numbers of verse. Sing of human hope by cross event destroy'd.

SING, verb. transitive.

1. To utter with musical modulation of voice. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. Rev. 15.

2. To celebrate in song; to give praises to in verse. The last, the happiest British king, whom thou shalt paint or I shall sing.

3. To relate or rehearse in numbers, verse or poetry. While stretch'd at ease you sing your happy loves."

1. First mention of singing in the New Testament. We have two verses which tell us expressly that the Lord Jesus Christ and those in attendance at the last Passover and the institution of the Lord's Supper sung a hymn after the Lord's Supper and went out.

Matthew 26:30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Mark 14:26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance (tradition, as some say). That Jesus instituted the Supper at the last Passover is not doubted by most. Furthermore, the Lord set the apostles in the church first (1 Cor. 12:28), which leaves us to understand the

church had already been established before the death of our Lord and during his earthly ministry. The record of our Lord's appointing the apostles from the company of His disciples is recorded in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19, and Luke 6:12-19). These twelve men were the first officers of the Lord's church.

Upon the institution of the Lord's Supper, after the last Passover which he ate with them before his crucifixion, it is clear that Jesus sang a hymn with them before they left the place where the supper was instituted. In other words, he sang in the midst of the church (Psalms 22:22 & Hebrews 2:12). Is it right, then, to sing in the church? That is, when the church is assembled? Yes – it is right – and we have both a pattern and precept for it. Many want to force patterns upon churches when there is no precept to reinforce the pattern. How far should a pattern go? This is a very serious question. For example:

We are told that many in the first church – the church at Jerusalem – “were together, and had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” (Acts 2:44-45). Does this example mean that we as New Testament churches must be together continually, have all things common and sell all our possessions and goods parting them to all men as there is need? No, we are not expressly told to do that anywhere in the Scriptures. Examples are good and useful when accompanied by a clear precept of Scripture. Let's see another example which does have a scriptural mandate:

We are told that these same people – the ones who came to be united to the church at Jerusalem – upon hearing Peter's words to “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ . . .,” did so. Acts 2:41 tells us

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that "they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Therefore, taking the whole tenor of Scripture into account with other commandments for believer's baptism, we conclude that the example of these being baptized is one that certainly must be followed.

2. The next mention of singing in the New Testament is found in Acts 16:25. Paul and Silas were in the stocks in the prison of Philippi.

Ac 16:25 *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and **sang praises unto God:** and the prisoners heard them.*

The writer has absolutely no doubt that Paul and Silas were accustomed to singing praises unto God, for they did it in the middle of the night while they were in deep trouble. When God's people sing unto God, that kind of song is usually called a hymn because it is addressed to God.

Another passage presents this same picture to us:

Romans 15:7-11 *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. 8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: 9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and **sing unto thy name.** 10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. 11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.*

Singing unto God – and unto His name is a practice continued from the Old Testament times. The Psalms are replete with admonitions to "sing unto the Lord." No less than eleven times does the Psalmist

mention singing to the Lord – which is a far different thing than singing 'about' the Lord. Paul and Silas sung unto the Lord and an earthquake followed!

Psalms 13:6 *I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalms 30:4 *Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.*

Psalms 95:1 *O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.*

Psalms 96:1 *O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth.*

Psalms 96:2 *Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.*

Psalms 98:1 *A Psalm. O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.*

Psalms 98:5 *Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.*

Psalms 104:33 *I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.*

Psalms 147:7 *Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:*

Psalms 149:1 *Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.*

Songs that are written expressly for the purpose of singing unto the Lord can be and are a great blessing to those who sing

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them. Who can doubt that God inhabits the praises of His people? Since women of the church are expressly forbidden to speak in the church – (at the very minimum in the context of unknown tongues and prophesying [expounding the scriptures]), how can they praise the Lord with the assembly except they sing?

It is abundantly clear to this writer that the saints shall sing unto the Lord in the ages to come. Note these passages from the Revelation:

Revelation 5:6-10 *And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. 8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And **they sung a new song**, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

Revelation 15:1-4 *And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. 2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. 3 And **they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb**, saying,*

Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. 4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

At the very least, we can say that the four and twenty elders – who are in Revelation 5:6-10 - clearly representative of all the redeemed from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation – sung a new song to our Lord – the Lamb of God. Those who overcome the beast and his image are said to be standing on the sea of glass with the harps of God singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. They are singing their song to the Lord God Almighty – the King of Saints. What a joyful way to sing – to sing unto the Lord!

It is marvelous to address a song to our God—the great I AM—and to know that He inhabits our songs of praise. With the eye of faith, a child of God can see His God high and lifted up on the throne in the heavens and the Lord Jesus Christ, God's lamb and our great High Priest, seated at His right hand. How unspeakably blessed is it to sing with the four and twenty elder, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*"

3. Singing with the spirit and with the understanding. Paul made this remarkable statement about singing to the church of God at Corinth.

1Co 14:15 *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will **sing** with the understanding also.*

In the context of speaking in <unknown> tongues (languages), Paul

Songs and Singing—continued

made this statement to stress both the spirit of singing and the understanding of it. Singing is a spiritual exercise and it encourages our spiritual man – the new man which is created in righteousness and true holiness. Singing ought to be done in the spirit – with a full attention to what is being sung and in consideration of the whole theme of the song. Consideration and contemplation of what we know of the God of the Bible in singing lends itself to singing in the spirit.

Singing with a lack of understanding is much like the Corinthian's abuse of tongues. If one cannot understand what is being articulated, will not he say 'ye are mad?' That is true either of expounding scripture or singing. That is one of the dire objections to the world of contemporary Christian music (CCM)—but not the only objection, of course. Like rock music and such like, most of the words are distorted in favor of a pulsating instrumental noise that overrides one's ability to understand what is being sung. In any case, if the use of an instrument in the singing of the saints drowns the words of the songs and makes them mis-understood or not understood at all, better it is to leave off the instrument. This writer has absolutely no use for either contemporary Christian music or rock music. Rock music is admittedly the music of rebellion — as their own performers have said in years past. God's children are not rebels and should not portray themselves as such by their singing or music.

Words of the songs we sing ought to be intelligible – easy to be understood and sung in such a way that the whole congregation can understand. This, of course, includes any who might come into our assembly. Those who visit the churches need to understand what we are singing. This was the apostle's point in making this statement.

Songs that are not sung distinctly and with meaning ought to be left off.

4. Speaking to ourselves . . . singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord.

This is the first of two New Testament commandments concerning songs and singing. We will look at the next one just a bit later in this article.

Ephesians 5: 18-21 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 **Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;** 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

We are told to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. What did the inspired writer mean to convey to us by these words? What do they mean?

Psalms: The word 'psalms' comes from the Greek word *psalmos* which, according to Strong's Concordance is taken from the Greek word *psallo* and *psao* – which had the suggested meaning of touching, or plucking of a musical instrument. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines psalms as: Any of the sacred songs contained in the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures; a version or paraphrase of any of these, esp. as sung or said in public or private worship.

Hymns: This comes from the Greek word '*hymnos* (hoom'-nos) apparently from a simpler (obsolete) form of *hudeo* (to celebrate) and probably akin to the Greek word *ado* (ad'-o). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines hymn as: A song of praise to God; any composition in praise of God which is adapted to be chanted or sung; spec. a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service; sometimes distinguished

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from *psalm* or *anthem*, as not being part of the text of the Bible.

Spiritual Songs: This expression comes from the Greek word 'ode' (o-day') and is translated as 'song' seven times in the New Testament. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines song as: A metrical composition adapted for singing, esp. one in rime and having a regular verse-form; occasionally, a poem.

Using all three of these different types of songs, we are enjoined to speak to ourselves, singing and making melody in our hearts. In other words, we are to speak to ourselves in singing. What does it mean to make melody in one's heart? It means to sing, of course, but making melody. Webster defines the noun 'melody' as: An agreeable succession of sounds; a succession of sounds so regulated and modulated as to please the ear. To constitute melody, the sounds must be arranged according to the laws of rhythms, measure, or the due proportion of the movements to each other. Melody differs from harmony, as it consists in the agreeable succession and modulation of sounds by a single voice; whereas harmony consists in the accordance of different voices or sounds. Melody is vocal or instrumental.

Singing of songs to ourselves which address the Lord – speak of the Lord – and encourage our spirit in the things of God are designed to make melody in our hearts. Blessed is the man who sings and contemplates the things of God – truths concerning God's person, God's purpose, and God's unconditional, everlasting, unchanging love to the saints. There can be little doubt that singing the songs of Zion has a great effect on our spiritual, mental, and physical well being for a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.

Proverbs 17:22 *A merry*

heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Jas 5:13 *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

5. Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . .

This is the second imperative to us as God's dear children concerning singing in the New Testament. Not only are we to speak to ourselves by singing in our hearts, but also to teach and admonish one another with the same kinds of singing.

Col 3:16 *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.***

It is clearly the design of God that part of our singing teaches and admonishes others in the church of which we are a part. This, of course, denotes assembling together for the purpose of singing. This is undoubtedly not the main reason for assembling together, but it is surely one of the reasons.

In our day, the singing in most churches amongst which we have had our early training has deteriorated to nothingness. The singing is dead without spirit and focus if there is singing at all. Some very small congregations have two or three people stand in the front of the meeting house as a choir sings while the congregation sits in silence—often with an apathetic attitude.

Special singing is stressed in nearly all churches to the sore neglect of congregational singing. Much special singing is nothing more than

Psalms 150:1-6 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.



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bizarre attempts at showmanship and is performance oriented. The singers are the objects of observation during their performances rather than God being the object. It is for this reason that congregational singing is far better. It is not that 'special singing' is necessarily *wrong*—but congregational singing is *better*. Congregational singing involves every member of the body and is a splendid time for obeying this command from Colossians 3:16.

Songs that are sung for the purpose of teaching and admonishing require a great deal of forethought. Many songs, written by well-meaning people, are not worth the paper they are written on when it comes to scriptural teaching and admonishment. Far from it! In fact, much of it is blasphemy and ought not to be sung in a congregation that claims to be the Lord's people. Sometimes entire songs must be omitted – other times verses should be omitted or words changed and altered so the truth is presented. Many songs that we 'have sung our whole life' are clearly unscriptural. Many are man centered instead of God centered. Since the Bible exalts God and shows sinful man for what he truly is, the songs of Zion ought to reflect the same truths.

How about Scripture songs and praise choruses? Some saints have been gifted with the ability to assemble songs from the Scriptures and make them easy to learn and sing. Such is the case with a number of churches. The Hidden Hills SG Baptist Church is no exception. What better way to teach and admonish than to sing the scriptures themselves? Many contend that we must sing only Psalms – but on investigation, the Psalms have been 'adjusted' with words left out or added. Some are put into a Psalter in this way. What is the difference in adapting a Psalm in this way and in the writing of a song with complete lyrics that expound scriptural truth?

The writer is looking at a little book entitled *The Psalms of David in Metre* which is

used by many churches in order to sing Psalms only. This particular book was published by the Trinitarian Bible Society, Tyn-dale House, Dorset Road, London, SW19 3NN, England. It is published "According to the version approved by The Church of Scotland and appointed to be used in worship." The Church of Scotland is the Presbyterian Church—a state church founded by both John Calvin and John Knox. Let us quote the very first song in the book:

"Psalm 1

1 That man hath perfect blessedness who walketh not astray
in counsel of ungodly men,
nor stands in sinners' way,
nor sitteth in the scorner's chair:



2 But placeth his delight
upon God's law, and meditates
on his law day and night.

3 He 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.

4 The wicked are not so;
But like they are unto the chaff,
Which wind drives to and fro.

5 In judgment therefore shall not stand
such as ungodly are;
nor in th' assembly of the just
shall wicked men appear.

6 For why? the way of godly men
unto the Lord is known:
whereas the way of wicked men
shall quite be overthrown."

The words are not the same, are they? Of course not! They have been altered so the song can be sung easily in the English language. Is that wrong? No—it is not, unless one denies or distorts the truth of

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the scriptures in his song.

Some are adamantly opposed to praise choruses and scripture songs in fear that they are moving toward the 'Contemporary Christian Music Crowd.' To fear singing praise to the Lord because one thinks that someone will dub him 'charismatic' is an unhealthy fear. Little does this writer concern himself with the possibility that others will place him in somebody's 'pigeon hole' or call him by some degrading name because of his praise to the Lord. Brethren, let us lift our voices and sing unto the Lord! Extol Him and bless his name!

What of musical instruments? Many say, dogmatically so, that all singing must be vocal only with no instruments. Many articles are available which are attempts to prove from the New Testament that musical instruments ought not be used. Such thinking makes this writer wonder how the harps ever made their way into the heavenlies. That the four and twenty elders played harps is not open to question (Rev. 5:8) The Apostle John heard the "harpers harping with their harps." (Rev. 14:2) One can have great expectations of glorious music and singing by thinking of "them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the **harps** of God." (Rev. 15:2).

This writer has very serious doubts that Jubal was the first with musical instruments—he and his worldly followers merely use them for the wrong purpose. One thing is certain—there is just as much scripture to support the use of a trumpet as there is stringed instruments—just as much to allow the playing of a timbrel as stringed instruments and organs. Some gag at the piano or guitar while extolling the virtues of pitch pipes to keep them on tune. The Psalmist said, "*Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.*" (Psalms 150:6). These arguments are clearly preferences for there is

nothing known to this writer in the New Testament which indicates the early church did or did not ever use musical instruments when they sung their songs.

It is the belief of this writer that things which are not clearly spelled out in the holy Scriptures ought not be made 'bones of contention,' but rather, ought to be left to the liberty and discretion of the Lord's churches. If a church wants to sing her songs with no instrumental accompaniment, so be it. On the other hand, if a church wants to use a guitar, it is their free option to do so. Some use pianos – some use organs – some use both. Some people like neither. Some people like none. It is a matter of liberty, brethren. Some churches use other kinds of musical instruments.

The main thing, for this writer, is that the assembly sings praise to God or sings for teaching and exhortation.

7. How much singing? This, too is a matter of discretion for the church. In the churches where the writer of this article grew up, we did the 'standard missionary Baptist' thing; three or four songs at the most – 1st, 2nd, and last verse if a song had more than three verses. It seemed to many of them a grievous thing to sing the third verse of the song. There were exceptions, of course. The reason for this never became apparent. For years, the writer thought this was standing operating procedures among Baptist churches. There were notable exceptions, though, for which we heartily thank God.

The Hidden Hills Sovereign Grace Baptist Church meets at noon on Sunday and at 7 PM on Wednesday evenings. On Sundays, the church sings for nearly an hour with numbers being called out by the congregation. We have a short break, then a song, Bible reading, and we usually sing for another hour. This is the will of the church body. The church is located in a sparsely

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Don't build your house on the sand!

Schedule of Services

Sunday Worship..... 12:00 PM
Wednesday Prayer..... 7:00 PM
Our meeting house is located at 50130 S.
Caswell Loop just south of the intersection of
Bendapole Road and Passthebait Avenue

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populated, rural area of Alaska. We decided—that is, the church decided—that we would have one service on Sunday instead of having people drive back and forth to two different services. This began out of a necessity because many of the church members were driving more than fifty miles to the services. Following the old established way of having two services on Sunday worked a great burden on people unnecessarily. Meeting this one time on Sunday seemed to strike a singing chord in all the members of the church. They wanted to sing—and they wanted to hear the word of God preached. They still do. As pastor of this church, it is refreshing, blessedly so, to see a people who come every time to every service unless they are hindered by providence. The preaching service begins immediately on the conclusion of the last song. Sometimes, our services last for four hours on Sundays – and two hours on Wednesday evenings.

The writer has been in churches where many in attendance tried to keep their eye on the clock to be sure that the preacher was finished at 12PM on the dot. These pray that the 'sermon and the song, won't be too long,' because something else beckons them. One can watch these same people set 'at the feet of their TV set' for hours on end without a twitch. Many who never lift their voice in song to the Lord are the driving force and leaders behind the screams and cheers at ball games and social outings. Two or three minutes past the 'worship hour' is, for these clock watchers, a 'thorn in their flesh.' One would think that the mourners of Zion would have the desire to lift their voices in praise to their God who showed mercy on them in bestowing life and immortality upon them through the death, burial, and resurrection of God's only beloved Son. Surely if they restrained themselves, the rocks would cry out!

