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Mid-Atlantic Christadelphian Bible School - 2001

THE HOUSE OF ASAPH - FAMILY OF FAITH AND MASTERS OF MUSIC

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Study #5: The faithfulness of the house of Asaph

Well, thank you brother chairman, and my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You'll remember, in our previous study yesterday, we looked at the house of Asaph from the time of Jehoshaphat to the time of Hezekiah. You'll remember how we saw Jehoiada's revival 25 years after Jehoshaphat, in approximately BC 835, and how he insisted on having the very best of the singers present at the coronation of Joash; and how the sons of Asaph, were in fact, the leading course of those leading singers in praise, who were there at the coronation of the king, so the very best of standards might be the benchmark of the young king's reign. Then you'll remember that about 120 years later, in approximately BC 715, we saw the tremendous readiness of the house of Asaph in the days of Hezekiah. We learned how this amazing family had practiced their songs in secret, through all those years of dreadful apostasy, and we learned to appreciate, did we not? the excellence of endeavour and to know that for the house of Asaph, even their practice each day was considered to be part of their offering to Almighty God.

So, what happened then to the house of Asaph after Hezekiah died? Well, you know, the reigns of the next two kings in Judah were amongst the worst in the history of the nation. In fact, if you come to 2 Kings 21, we're told of the circumstances of the king that followed Hezekiah, who was, of course, his son, Manasseh. We're told in 2 Kings 21 and reading from verse 4 it says this, 'He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh said, In Jerusalem will I put My name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Yahweh'. Verse 7, 'And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which Yahweh said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this, house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put My name for ever'. There, b&s, inside the very house of God, Manasseh put a graven image of the grove. What would it have been like to be one of the singers in the days of this man, Manasseh, b&s, and his successor Amon was little better than he, because in this same chapter, in the reign of Amon we're told, in 2 Kings 21 verse 21 it says of Amon his son, 'And he walked in all the way that his father walked in and served the idols that his father served and worshipped them. He forsook Yahweh Elohim of his fathers and walked not in that particular way, the way of God'.

But his son, the son of Amon, surprisingly was a man altogether different in spirit to his father, because, of course, the son of Amon was none other than good king Josiah of Judah. If you come to 2 Chronicles 34, this man was going to launch yet another revival in the nation of Judah and the history of that people. We're told there in verse 30 (right at the end of the chapter it says this), 'And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the Levites, and all the people great and small: he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Yahweh. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book'. So here was a man that was going to begin things afresh!

He repaired and he cleansed the temple, and then, standing here at the temple, he bound the nation into a covenant promise, 'that they might keep the Law of God again, as it was written in the scroll of the book of Deuteronomy'. You see, Josiah, I believe, knew by this stage, that judgment could not be avoided. He knew that judgment would come and could not be avoided, but the desire of Josiah was that he would try to build, nevertheless, a spiritual remnant, who although carried away to Babylon, would become the spiritual core of those who might one day come back to the Land of promise. He knew that he could not avoid the judgment on Judah, it had already been pronounced in this chapter. God had already said they will go into captivity, the nation will be judged, but I think Josiah's spirit of endeavour here in causing the nation to be pledged again to the Law, was that he might build a remnant that could be saved out of Babylon in due course.

Then we're told in chapter 35 verse 1, of the great passover that Josiah celebrated in his 18th year. Now I want you to notice something really interesting about the opening verses of this chapter. It says in verse 1, 'Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto Yahweh in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the 14th day of the first month. And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of Yahweh. And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto Yahweh, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build'. Now if those words are true, b&s, in 2 Chronicles 35 verse 3, then the burning question of this chapter is, where was the ark? and who had it? If the command came to the Levites in the 3rd verse that they should put it back into the house, where was the ark of God? and, I think there are three possibilities as to what had happened to the ark on this occasion in the history of the nation.

The first is, and it has been suggested and it's perfectly reasonable, that it was taken out by Josiah himself, at the time of the cleansing of the temple. So, that's one possibility and it may well be so; that Josiah had removed the ark in the course of his cleansing and repair of the temple in the previous chapter.

A second possibility is, and this is what the Rabbinical writers of the Jews say,

that it was actually sent forth by Manasseh to make room for the idolatrous statues which he wished to bring in to the house of God. That it was at the request of Manasseh that the ark was removed in order that he might bring in his own private idols of worship into the house.

But a third possibility is, and I'm going to suggest to you this morning, that this is quite possibly what did happen, is that the ark of God was removed by the Levites themselves in order to prevent the desecration of the ark in these times of the apostasy of Manasseh and Amon. Now, if the Levites were to have taken the ark, who would carry the ark? Of course, there's no doubt about that, is there? it would be the Kohathites. Only the Kohathites were allowed to lift the ark. But who would be with them in spirit? The answer is surely, the house of Asaph, because the house of Asaph, well, their whole job was to sing before the ark of God and to celebrate the sacredness of that ark, and what it stood for. If there was ever a family in Israel that would want to see, that would want to prevent any desecration to the ark, it would be the house of Asaph, and we wonder whether perhaps the house of Asaph, in collaboration with the Kohathites, had ensured that the ark was spirited away at this time into a place of safety, so that it might not be defiled or profaned.

Now, do you know why we suggest that that is possibly what happened? It's because of the strange phrase that occurs later on in this 3rd verse; because, you see, what the verse goes on to say, 'Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build'; and then he says this, 'it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders'. Now, by the way, those words come from the 1 Chronicles 23 verse 26 (as the margin tells us) and in those words of David on an earlier occasion, what we're being told, when the ark of God finally came to its resting place in the temple, the Levites were told that it would no longer be their burden to carry the ark anymore, it had come to its final resting place! So why does Josiah say to them, 'it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders', unless the ark had in recent times become yet again a burden of responsibility to the Kohathites? And why might it have become in recent times, a burden again to the Kohathites? the answer is because they had recently borne the ark forth, in collaboration with the sons of Asaph, who would be determined to safeguard it from damage and defilement; after all as the verse says, 'it was the holy ark'. So I believe, b&s, that when Josiah in this verse, asked the Levites to put the ark in the house, I think he meant for them to put it back in the house, because they had it! That's exactly therefore what they did!

What then follows is a magnificent Passover celebration the like of which had not been seen for hundreds of years in the history of the nation. They observed everything according to the writings of David and of Solomon, and the writing of Moses; everything was to be done according to scripture and the writing of scripture on this occasion. One thing I can tell you, b&s, and it's a remarkable thing, is that when the ark of God suddenly reappears back in the temple on this occasion, guess who's there, quick as a flash? verse 15, 'And the singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the

porters waited at every gate'. You know, it was not a requirement of the Passover law that the singers be present at Passover time. So, the house of Asaph are not there in verse 15 because it is in any sense a commandment of Moses; and, I don't think they were there because Josiah had instructed them to be there, because the record doesn't tell us, at any stage of this chapter, that Josiah had specifically requested that the house of Asaph be there. And although they were there in accordance with the instructions of David, I don't think they were there because of the commandment of David either! I think the house of Asaph was there in the 15th verse for one reason only, they were there on an entirely voluntary basis, b&s, they were there because no power on earth could have stopped them from being there that day. This was their chance to minister before the ark with the singing of their family psalms; you try stopping them from being there that day! There must have been tears for joy in the house of Asaph as they sang their psalms before the ark on this occasion, because the discipline of practice now had its fulfillment in an outpouring of praise in public worship. Some of these here this day, had waited all their lives for this one moment. This one day, at the time of Josiah, for the chance to sing before the ark, just this once.

Can you imagine, b&s, if we were told that we had but one chance, but one opportunity to sing in an evening of song and praise, in a choral evening of worship to our Father; one chance in our life to sing in a choir and to offer praise to the Father! How would we sing on that night? Wouldn't we strain every fibre of our being lifting up our songs of praise? This is the last occasion, b&s, this chapter, 2 Chronicles 35, this is the last occasion in recorded history, that the ark of God appears amongst the children of Israel, and who's there singing in front of the ark with all their hearts, but the house of Asaph! It's exactly the spirit that we would have expected of this family!

You know, Psalm 81 celebrates that particular time in the life of Josiah. If we come back to Psalm 81, and we've already looked at this in terms of the fact that the great theme of Psalm 81 is connected with both the book of the Law and the theme of Passover, but just have a look at the recurring refrain, the recurring refrain of Psalm 81. I think that this psalm was brought forth by the house of Asaph at the very time of Josiah's reformation, and that's what it captures: it's the bitter-sweet sadness of Josiah's reformation. He knew that the bulk of the people were lost, he desperately wanted to build a remnant if he could; and, here's the refrain of Psalm 81, verse 8, 'Hear O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto Me'; verse 11, 'But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me'; verse 13, 'Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways'; and, you see, what this psalm dwells on, b&s, it is a lamentation of the tragedy of the people for whom the time of repentance had gone! If only they had listened! If only they had hearkened! What could have been done! What might have been accomplished! It's a psalm of lamentation that shows all the pathos and all the heart break of those there, who saw Josiah's mighty effort and who knew the desperate sadness of the king in his endeavours of reformation. I think that that psalm from the house of Asaph breathes all the sadness of that moment in the history of the nation. Do you know when this episode took place, the great Passover of Josiah, in 2 Chronicles 35? Well, this is about BC 620 and, therefore,

it is 95 years after Hezekiah's reformation in 2 Chronicles 29. So, from the time the singers sang in the days of Hezekiah, we've marched forward another 95 years to come to the great Passover of Josiah, in 2 Chronicles 35; that's about another three generations of the house of Asaph; but they're still there quick as a flash, when the ark of God reappears in the temple in Josiah's time.

So, what must this family have felt when a king as good as Josiah died? Well, we're told actually in 2 Chronicles 35, because this is the tragedy of what happened in the time of Josiah. He embarked upon this reformation and upon this wondrous Passover at which the house of Asaph sang; but, we're told in 2 Chronicles 35 and verse 23, 'And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day'. You see, I can imagine how desperately sad the house of Asaph would have been, when such a man as this, who was so close in spirit to them died, and that work of revival began to decline again because, with the death of Josiah, the nation now rapidly did decline, through the reign of Jehoahaz, through the time of Jehoiakim, through the reign of Jeohiachin, to the time of Zedekiah, when finally all was lost and the nation was about to be carried forth into captivity, the house of God was burned with fire.

Psalm 74 and Psalm 79, were written by the house of Asaph, weeping as they went forth into captivity in Babylon at the desolation that had come upon the house of God and bitter lamentation for the spiritual failure of the nation. In the meantime, b&s, the sons of Asaph were put in the basket of good things, and they were carried to Babylon. What was their spirit when they got to Babylon, do you think? What do you think the spirit and the attitude of the family of Asaph was when they came into the land of the stranger and into their place of captivity? Well, I think we know, I think we're given a psalm that tells us exactly how the house of Asaph felt in captivity. Now what might that psalm be? Well, it's Psalm 137. Now come and have a look at this, because I think this psalm tells us exactly what the spirit of this family was in the time of their captivity in the land of Babylon. It says there in the first verse, you see, well, before we even get to the first verse, the heading over my bible for Psalm 137 says, 'The constancy of the Jews in captivity', that's the heading for the psalm, 'The constancy of the Jews in captivity'; but, I don't think that this psalm celebrates the constancy of the Jews in general, I think that this psalm celebrates the constancy of a particular group of Jews in captivity. Now, do you know who that group might be? Well, I'll tell you, it's the group who are known as 'the singers'. This psalm is all about the singers who went to Babylon, and the psalm will reveal the spirit of the house of Asaph. Here's a breakup, or a breakdown, as the case may be, of Psalm 137: it's a very simple one:

verses 1 to 3 - pathos;
verses 4 to 6 - defiance;

verses 7 to 9 - judgment.

This psalm is the spirit of the house of Asaph in Babylon. They were determined not to give up their songs, but they were equally determined that they would not sing them to the heathen. So, when it says on reading verse 1, 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion'. Now who might the Babylonians have asked to sing the songs of Zion, b&s? but the families of the singers! But, what was the spirit of the singers? verse 4, 'How shall we sing Yahweh's song in a strange land'. Now, you see, I think that the words of verse 4 are not the spirit of apathy, I think that here instead, was that silence which sprang from a burning loyalty to the truth, only made more intense by the disaster of the captivity. It wasn't that this family weren't prepared to sing the songs of God, b&s! but they would not sing them to strangers.

You see what verses 5 and 6 say, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth'. Tongues and hands! Now, who might those two words refer to in Psalm 137? tongues and hands, but the singers on instruments! This is the vow of loyalty that the singers made in Babylon that they would never forget Jerusalem in all of their captivity. Now, I think that this particular psalm is appropriate to the overthrow of Babylon, it has been used, by the way, on some occasions in the brotherhood, to argue other causes such as relating it to the time of the Assyrians and Sennacherib, I do not think that that's so, I think it is definitely a psalm relating to the Babylonian captivity. I can think of three good reasons for saying so:

firstly, in verse 7, 'the day of Jerusalem' what that referred to, is the day when the foundations of the city of Jerusalem were discovered; it's clearly the day of Jerusalem's overthrow! The overthrow of Jerusalem never happened in the days of the Assyrians; Sennacherib never got even inside the city, he never did overthrow Jerusalem; but this psalm is a lamentation for the day when Jerusalem fell, and that relates to the Babylonians.

In verse 8, the words 'happy', 'reward' and 'served' are all deliberately taken from Jeremiah chapter 51 and verse 56 concerning the future overthrow of Babylon. The very verbs of Psalm 137 verse 8 are taken specifically from the prophecy of Jeremiah 51 verse 56, which most certainly is not about Assyria, it's about Babylon.

And lastly verse 9 says, 'happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones'; and, Rotherham translates that, 'blessed is the man that shall do these things'; and, this psalm looks forward to a particular individual that one day would conquer Babylon and answer the prayers of the singers who were there.

You see, I think what Psalm 137 is talking about, b&s, is that the way by which the

singers would not forget Jerusalem, was that they would continue to practice the songs of Zion, in the blazing conviction that one day they would return there! This psalm is the passion and the drive and the commitment of the house of Asaph in captivity. It wasn't that they wouldn't sing the temple songs in a strange land, but they wouldn't sing them for the public amusement of profane and scornful heathen. So, in public, therefore, they showed that their singing was over, and their harps abandoned; but, in private, they practiced like they always had, because they vowed in this psalm that they'd never ever forget Jerusalem with their heart or their hand or their tongue. You see, this family never gave in, and they never gave up! and one day, one blessed day, the deliverer of their prayers appeared, and his name was Cyrus!

In Ezra chapter 1 we're told of the great proclamation of Cyrus that would lead to a return of the Jewish people from captivity, and this is what we're told in Ezra 1 and reading from the second verse. 'Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh God of Israel'. Now can you imagine, b&s, this phrase in the 3rd verse uttered in the proclamation of Cyrus, can you imagine the impact of this phrase upon the house of Asaph in particular, 'who is there of all His people that might respond to this call?'. Well, you just know that it would have to be the house of Asaph, wouldn't you? that of all the families that would desire to go back to the Land of Israel and to the place of the house of God, and to the presence of God amongst His people, it would be the house of Asaph.

So, it is with no surprise then, that when we come to Ezra 2 and we read the list of the genealogy of those who returned in this first wave, this first return of the redeemed to Zion under Zerubbabel and Joshua, in Ezra 2 verse 41, amongst those who came in this very first wave, it says, 'The singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred twenty and eight'. So this was the family, perhaps above all others, who celebrated the spirit of Psalm 137, that they would never forget Jerusalem, because when the chance first came to come back to the Land, the house of Asaph are there, right at the front, right at the forefront, and that brings us, you see to Ezra chapter 3 because here now is the story in Ezra 3 of the laying again of the foundation of the temple. This was an exciting moment in the history of the nation.

Now, you see what the 7th verse says in Ezra 3, 'They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat (and that word 'meat' by the way, ought to be translated 'meal', shouldn't it? it's the word for 'meal' because it's really to do with 'grain'). 'So they gave grain and drink (and that drink is 'wine') and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa'. So, what this verse tells us is that they made arrangements to supply exports of grain, of wine, and of oil in return for cedars from Lebanon floated down to Joppa. Do you know where that all comes from? That is a deliberate re-enactment of the days of Solomon. Now, keep your place in Ezra 3 and come back with me to 2 Chronicles 2, because this

is what happened in the days of Solomon, we're told there in verse 3, it says this, here's Solomon building the temple, and I think in Ezra chapter 3 that those that had come back to the Land deliberately did it this way, that they might echo the days of Solomon; they wanted to recreate the golden age of Solomon all over again. Verse 3 says, 'Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father and didst send him cedars to build him a house to dwell therein, even so deal with me'. Then in verse 10, this is what he said he'd be prepared to pay, 'Behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley', so, that's the grain; 'and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil'. So, there was an arrangement for the export of grain, of wine and of oil, in return for what? Well, in return for trees, and Hiram agreed because verse 15 says, 'Now therefore, the wheat and the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants. And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee, in floats by sea to Joppa'. Oh, now that's the very language of Ezra chapter 3 and verse 7, and I think that what happened is that when they came back to the Land, that they deliberately re-enacted the story of Solomon — they wanted to recreate the temple as it was in its glory in earlier times.

Come back to Ezra chapter 3 and now read verse 8, 'Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel and Jeshua', and if we were to ask what was it that they began in the eighth verse, the answer is they began to lay the foundation of the temple, but when did they lay it? well, the 8th verse says in the second month. But if you come back to 1 Kings 6, you'll find that that was the very month that Solomon began to build the temple. I think they choose this time deliberately, you see, in 1 Kings 6 we're told in verse 1, 'It came to pass in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of Yahweh'. And not only that, but if you come to verse 37 of that chapter, it says, 'In the 4th year was the foundation of the house of Yahweh laid, in the month Zif', so the second month was the very month that Solomon laid the foundations of the temple. Now, in Ezra 3 verse 8, Jeshua and Zerubbabel begin to lay the foundations of the temple in the second month, oh, yes, I think they knew exactly what they were doing on this occasion.

Ezra 3 verse 10, 'And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Yahweh, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Yahweh after the ordinance of David king of Israel'. Now, you see, what we're being told in verse 10, I think, this was again, exactly the same as it was in the day that the ark of God was taken in, in Solomon's celebration. It's all the same all over again, you see, the trumpeters are there, the singers are there, the instruments are there, they're all clothed in the robes of linen, it's exactly as if it were Solomon's day all over again, and yet of course, it wasn't Solomon's day! Yet honestly, b&s, in the 10th verse there is really heart rending pathos to this particular scene on this occasion; because as we looked about the hill on which they stood, on the occasion of

Ezra 3 verse 10, the signs of desolation are everywhere. The temple mount is still scared and ravaged from Babylonian fire, but there amidst the signs of ruin, embedded into the good earth of Mount Moriah, sunk into its rocky outcrop, was a row of freshly dressed stones, clean and sharp that was the beginning of a new foundation for a new temple; and who's there ready to sing the songs of the LORD? why, the sons of Asaph. Did you notice, by the way, in that verse it doesn't mention either Heman or Jeduthun. There's no record that either the sons of Heman or the sons of Jeduthun returned at this time, only the sons of Asaph are there; you see, these are the ones perhaps more than any others, who kept that burning flame of Psalm 137 alive!

Look what it says in verse 11, 'They sang together by course'. Do you know, that in Nehemiah chapter 7, we're told that when some of the priests came back to the Land, that they couldn't prove their lineage, could they, and they weren't able to establish what priestly course they belonged to, do you remember that? The sons of Asaph had no trouble with knowing what their course was! they were ready to sing in their courses after all this time without hesitation, they knew exactly what their orders and their courses were, and they were ready to sing at the command of Jeshua and Zerubbabel, and what do they sing? Verse 11, 'they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks (oh, so there are the two key words), they praised and gave thanks, and you'd never believe what the words of their song were! b&s, would you? 'They gave thanks unto Yahweh for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel', why that's 1 Chronicles 16 and verse 34. The foundation might be new, b&s, but the singers who sang in front of that new foundation this day, sang their old songs to the old words! They didn't find them old fashioned, they found them absolutely fresh and new because they believed they were singing eternal truths! Do you know that this episode in Ezra 3, b&s, well, it's 85 years after the time of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35. It's 85 years later, this is BC 535, but it's 460 years after David gave this psalm to this family in 1 Chronicles 16; 460 years later, b&s! You know, we're told on the occasion of this chapter that there were some who wept; some who wept because of the joy of building a new temple, some who wept because they remembered the glories of the old. I would have wept on that day, b&s, for a family who after 460 years could stand up and sing the same hymn, to the same words, and never to have forgotten it in their family through all those generations; and, you see, this is the spirit of Psalm 137. They said, let us never forget those who said, 'rase it, rase it to the very foundations thereof'; and, now, in triumph, they sing before a fresh foundation that arises upon the good earth. You see, they didn't despise the day of small things!

They were always there at the time of a spiritual revival, b&s. The house of Asaph were there ready to sing their ancient songs all over again. You see, I think this is the great lesson of our study this morning, it is the lesson of the virtue of constancy, it's one of the great principles that the house of Asaph stood for. You know, we have hymns in our hymn book today that come from the Golden Harp. Now, do you know what the Golden Harp is? the Golden Harp was the very first Christadelphian hymn book. You know, we've still got hymns that we sing today from that first hymn book. I think that's marvellous that we still sing according to the principle of our old ancient heritage. You

know, our hymn book, b&s, the Christadelphian hymn book over the years, well, it did borrow hymns from other sources, but I'll tell you what, our earlier brethren that borrowed those hymns, put them through a mighty fine sieve and by the time they got through that sieve into our hymn book, the words and the spirit so utterly echoed what we believed that we could sing that psalm or that song and give a hearty 'amen' to the words; it preserved the heritage of our faith. We need to appreciate how vital a hymn book is, in holding together a community to those principles that we believe in. You see, this house never ever once changed their hymns because they believed that the truths they sang were eternal. Well, so are our truths, b&s; so, therefore, we believe that we should treasure and value the hymn book that we have. Whenever I hear a brother or sister saying that they think the hymns are boring, I think there's a problem. I think they haven't discovered the true majesty and power of the scriptural record that will make those hymns come alive! But what I do know for certain is that the solution doesn't lie in borrowing from modern Christian sources.

And there is a bit of that in the brotherhood today, an increasing use of music from modern Christian sources; but, the danger is that we may not use the same careful discriminating process that was used by earlier generations of Christadelphians, especially given the fact that modern Christian music is nothing other than pure humanism with a religious coat on. It's nothing more than that! It's utterly different to the spirit of the truth. We need to be very careful, b&s, in terms of the source of our music. Now, I'm all for exploring new music in worship, I think it's good, and we do, especially in our special evenings of song and praise, but if this spirit of searching for new music is to replace our hymn book, because we think it's boring, then I'm passionately against new music, if that's the motive. But, if we want to sing other spiritual songs as well as treasure our hymn book, then I think that's a wonderful thing; our hymn book should remain the core of our spiritual worship and that hymn book in turn, ought to maintain the heritage of our faith and be the standard bearer for what we truly believe is proper music according to the benchmark of the house of Asaph. You see, the spirit of today is, we want something new, we want something new! The spirit of the house of Asaph was treasure the old, treasure the old! It's a different spirit, isn't it? But, you see, the spirit of that family is what kept them faithful down through all these years. You know, change sometimes can seem to be very small; such a little change here and there may seem to be harmless: beware the triumph of gradualism! It is by little changes, b&s, that our songs of worship might be unperceptively altered over time until our faith is lost. We don't ever want that to happen. So, you watch the trends, and if the trend is towards an increasing focus on music at the expense of the words, then resist the trend! and stay with those old and lovely things that we've sung as a community and that has kept us faithful as a brotherhood now for a long period of time. Not as long, mind you, as the house of Asaph who managed to stay on the same hymn book without revision for an awful long period of time.

The virtue of constancy, you see, the instruments of music were specially made by David for praising the LORD — It suggested that David received the pattern for these by divine revelation and that he received this in common with the pattern for all other

instruments that were used for service in the temple (1 Chronicles 28 vs.11-14,19). They were known therefore as musical instruments of God (1 Chronicles 16 verse 42).

Later revivals of the temple worship did not deviate from this standard, and the songs of the LORD were still sung with the instruments of David, the man of God. (2 Chronicles 29 vs.25-27, Nehemiah 12 verse 36)

In similar fashion, the words of these songs were jealously guarded by the house of Asaph. The original psalm delivered to them by David to sing, (1 Chronicles 16 verses 7-8, 34) became the centre of their praise, it's simple majesty undimmed by centuries (2 Chronicles 7 verse 6, 2 Chronicles 20 verse 21, Ezra 3 verses 10-11). It is reasonable to assume that just as both instrument and word did not vary, so also, the music played remained unchanged throughout the centuries. I believe that, b&s. I believe that when the house of Asaph sang their songs in Ezra chapter 3, that they sang the same words, played on the same instruments, sung to the same tune. They never ever varied this faithful family!

Well, b&s, they're back in the Land! they've come back and there's more to the story yet, because the story's not quite finished, as to what finally happened to the house of Asaph. Well, we must wait until tomorrow to find out.