

A New Song



It had been a long time since Nathan had opened his home to a Passover visitor. He had felt ashamed of his circumstances now. So unlike the days when he and Leah had entertained notable people in their town house. So many things had changed. Nathan often wondered if God had forgotten him. Tragedy upon tragedy had left him living in the poorest quarter by the sheep market - an old man alone with his memories.

So it had been with some embarrassment he had agreed to share his room with the stranger from Ephesus. The young man's grandfather had remembered Nathan from many Passovers ago and Mark for that was his name had sought him out. Mark, not seeming to notice the clean poverty, treated his aged host with deep respect. Nathan took to him immediately. He was thrilled to hear of a young man's adventures on the road to Jerusalem.

Mark for his part was equally enthralled with the old man's stories of life in the city, especially of the great festivals. In no time a deep friendship grew between them. So much so that on the night before Mark was to leave, old Nathan took him into his confidence.

"I have something to show you." He said it quietly as though afraid to be overheard. He lit a lamp and closed the window shutters before uncovering the seat on which he had been sitting. It was a wooden chest - a most ornate piece of work with a heavy lock. The old man drew a key from the folds of his threadbare robe. The chest lid opened easily, and he carefully pulled out a bundle of cloth. Mark held the lamp close as the Nathan unwrapped the purple folds.

"It's a harp!" Mark exclaimed. "It's very old."

"David's harp," said Nathan in a quietly reverent voice

"King David's?" asked Mark with a smile which quickly became a gasp as Nathan replied.

"Yes. One of his. It has been in our family for many, many generations."

Mark, incredulous, asked if he could hold it. The old man gave it to him, keeping his hands extended for fear the young man might drop it.

"The Lord has stripped me of all my other possessions," he said.

"But he has let me keep this one. I would rather he take my life than part me from this." Nathan closed the lid of the chest and sat down on it.

Mark was fascinated

"No," said Nathan. "But one of my ancestors fought alongside the King. The story has been handed down through many generations. His name was Joash - a royal name. Because of his great deeds in the King's service David made Joash one of his special aides when he set up his throne in Jerusalem. He was at the King's side on the Great day when they brought the Ark of the Covenant to be placed in the tent David had prepared for it here in the city. You remember, of course, how the Ark had been captured by the Philistine armies and how it caused them so much trouble they had to return it. It stayed at Kiriath-Jearim for twenty years until David brought it to Jerusalem." Mark nodded at every point of the story. It was just as he had heard it told by his father.

There was a passionate glow in the old man's eyes as he continued.

"What a day that must have been. They came in a great procession. The whole city was there. The King led the way amid fanfares of trumpets and singing by the priests and people. David wore just a simple linen garment and danced before the Lord to honour him. Sacrifices were made, prayers were offered

Nathan paused for breath.

"And what about the harp," asked Mark

"I'm coming to that. That evening, amid the celebrations, the King took this harp ... " Nathan took the instrument from Mark's hands and rested it on his knees. "The king had many harps but this one had been with him when the armies were routing the Philistines. He composed a song of praise on that day and accompanied himself on this harp. When he had finished he said to my ancestor Joash, "Joash, I have sung such praise to our God today that I cannot play anything else on this harp ever again. Then he handed it to Joash and said, "Take care of it for me and tell your sons the King played it before the Lord."

There was a long silence. Mark could not bring himself to break it. At last the old man plucked the strings of the harp. He had played it often. "Do you remember the words of David's Song," he murmured. "They were singing it in the Temple yesterday." Gently he plucked the strings. There was a deep resonance in his voice as he sang softly. "Sing a new song to the Lord. He has done wonderful things ... he has won the victory ... he has made his saving power known among the nations ... he has kept his promise to Israel He has been loyal and shown constant love to them."

Nathan stopped singing and looked straight at Mark. "I still believe that you know. We have a great God! I was a young man like you when I first really believed. It was here at Passover. In the Temple they sang this song just as my father had taught it to me. In that moment I felt I had a new song in my heart. God was real. God was mighty. We were his people!" The old eyes were alight again with the memories. "I may have fallen on hard times," he continued. "But my faith in God hasn't. Nothing has yet taken that song from my heart."

He shifted the harp on his knees and began to sing the psalm again.. "Play music on the harps. Blow trumpets and horns ...shout for joy to the Lord.... He will rule the peoples of the world with justice and fairness."

Nathan stopped again "His kingdom *will* come." He said it slowly and firmly. "I feel it in my bones. The Messiah will not be long in coming. There's someone claiming to be Messiah again this year Maybe... All I know is that he *will* come and when he does he'll put a new song in the hearts of us all, and the whole world will be singing it ... a song of salvation joy."

The unaccustomed excitement had taken its toll Nathan was tiring. "Would you like to hold it again? Mark nodded and took the harp from him "You shall have it," Nathan spoke suddenly, as though the idea had just occurred to him. "The harp. I will give it to you ... as David gave it to Joash."

"But...but..." Mark was lost for words "I have no son now to pass it on to. You will be my heir. I know by the way you hold it you will treasure it. Pass it on to your sons and tell them the story. May you find the new song in your heart. May you see the Messiah in your day."

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*The Messiah did come.  
Jesus came.  
By his words of life  
By his Cross and resurrection  
He has given a new song of joy in the heart to all who  
believe in him  
and has promised the coming of a day when the  
whole world will sing of the salvation of God*