

Negro Spiritual : Balm In Gilead

Refrain:

There is a balm in Gilead

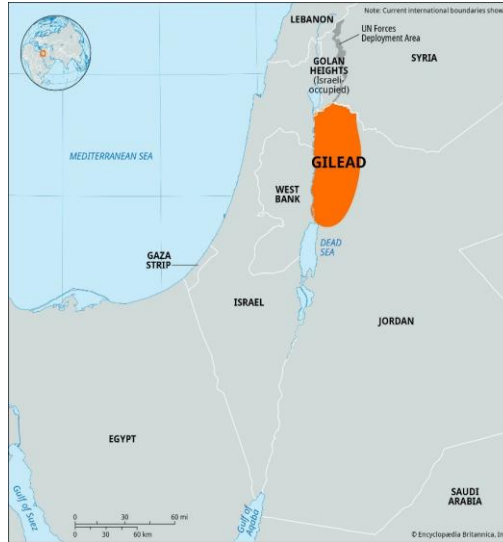
to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged
and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again. Refrain

2 If you cannot preach like Peter,
if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus
and say, "He died for all." Refrain

Psalter Hymnal, (Gray), 1987

This spiritual is a compilation of content from composers from very interesting backgrounds and circumstances. I took some information from Wikipedia to give us some background on the principle composer of the “hymn.”



WHY THIS FOR HOLIDAY MESSAGING?

1. Holiday is a time of heightened awareness of the birth of Christ.
2. Holiday time is typically when we pause our busy schedules and fellowship with others we have not seen during the year.
3. Holiday time is a time when people are out shopping and enjoying the festivity of the season.
4. Holiday time is a “created” thing. While it is reminiscent of the celebration of Jewish feasts (celebrating the works of God), it becomes our RESPONSIBILITY to minister to a culture who has adopted these practices.
5. FROM THE PASSAGES THAT REFERENCE THIS “BALM,” THE PROPHETS WERE REALLY TALKING ABOUT AN ETERNAL HEALING AGENT (not a temporary one). GOD WAS TESTIFYING OF THE COMING OF HIS SON – **J E S U S** !!! (That’s what the prophets ultimately did).

Gilead:

Gilead was a mountainous area to the east of the Jordan River (the biblical territory known as the Transjordan). The territory was assigned to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. The region was known for its fertile land, making it a place suitable for sustaining livestock. It was known for the famous “balm of Gilead” that is sung about in the Negro spiritual.

INTERESTING BACKGROUND

From Wikipedia.org (John Newton)

John Newton (/ˈnjuːtən/; 4 August [O.S. 24 July] 1725 – 21 December 1807) was an English [evangelical Anglican cleric](#) and slavery [abolitionist](#). He had previously been a captain of slave ships and an investor in the slave trade. He served as a sailor in the [Royal Navy](#) (after forced recruitment) and was himself enslaved for a time in West Africa. He is noted for being author of the hymns "[Amazing Grace](#)" and "[Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken](#)".

Newton went to sea at a young age and worked on slave ships in the [Atlantic slave trade](#) for several years. In 1745, he himself became a slave of Princess Peye, a woman of the [Sherbro people](#) in what is now [Sierra Leone](#).^[2] He was rescued, returned to sea and the trade, and captained several slave ships. After retiring from active sea-faring, he continued to invest in the slave trade. Some years after experiencing a [conversion to Christianity](#) during his rescue, Newton renounced his trade and became a prominent supporter of [abolitionism](#). Now an evangelical, he was ordained as a [Church of England](#) cleric and served as [parish priest](#) at [Olney, Buckinghamshire](#), for two decades and wrote hymns.

Newton lived to see the British Empire's [abolition of the African slave trade](#) in 1807, just months before his death.

As we look through the Scripture tonight, let's discuss what we have come to know about the prophets. The people in exile (representative of our condition even today) were being held captive for specifically identified circumstances. When we share the word of Christ (the Good News of His sacrifice for us), we need to borrow the context from the prophets to help us describe exactly why we NEED Jesus! This season is far more than another opportunity for fellowship – it is one for discipleship!

**Jeremiah 8:18-22 The Prophet
Mourns for the People**

¹⁸ I would comfort myself in sorrow;
My heart *is* faint in me.

¹⁹ Listen! The voice,
The cry of the daughter of my people
From a far country:
“*Is* not the Lord in Zion?
Is not her King in her?”

“Why have they provoked Me to anger
With their carved images—
With foreign idols?”

²⁰ “The harvest is past,
The summer is ended,
And we are not saved!”

²¹ For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am
hurt.

I am mourning;
Astonishment has taken hold of me.

²² *Is there* no balm in Gilead,
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no recovery
For the health of the daughter of my people?

**Jeremiah 22:6-9 Prophecies against the
kings of Judah Section**

⁶ For thus says the Lord to the house of the king
of Judah:

“You *are* Gilead to Me,
The head of Lebanon;
Yet I surely will make you a wilderness,
Cities *which* are not inhabited.

⁷ I will prepare destroyers against you,
Everyone with his weapons;
They shall cut down your choice cedars
And cast *them* into the fire.

⁸ And many nations will pass by this city; and
everyone will say to his neighbor, ‘Why has the
Lord done so to this great city?’ ⁹ Then they will
answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the
covenant of the Lord their God, and worshiped
other gods and served them.’ ”

Jeremiah 46:1-12 Judgment on Egypt

46 The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah
the prophet against the nations. ² Against Egypt.

Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of
Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in
Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim
the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

³ “Order the buckler and shield,
And draw near to battle!

⁴ Harness the horses,
And mount up, you horsemen!
Stand forth with *your* helmets,
Polish the spears,
Put on the armor!

⁵ Why have I seen them dismayed *and* turned
back?

Their mighty ones are beaten down;
They have speedily fled,
And did not look back,
For fear was all around,” says the Lord.

⁶ “Do not let the swift flee away,
Nor the mighty man escape;
They will stumble and fall
Toward the north, by the River Euphrates.

⁷ “Who *is* this coming up like a flood,
Whose waters move like the rivers?

⁸ Egypt rises up like a flood,
And *its* waters move like the rivers;
And he says, ‘I will go up *and* cover the earth,
I will destroy the city and its inhabitants.’

⁹Come up, O horses, and rage, O chariots!
And let the mighty men come forth:
The Ethiopians and the Libyans who handle the
shield,
And the Lydians who handle *and* bend the bow.
¹⁰For this *is* the day of the Lord God of hosts,
A day of vengeance,
That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries.
The sword shall devour;
It shall be satiated and made drunk with their
blood;

For the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice
In the north country by the River Euphrates.

¹¹“Go up to Gilead and take balm,
O virgin, the daughter of Egypt;
In vain you will use many medicines;
You shall not be cured.

¹²The nations have heard of your shame,
And your cry has filled the land;
For the mighty man has stumbled against the
mighty;
They both have fallen together.”

The "[balm in Gilead](#)" is a reference from the [Old Testament](#), but the lyrics of this [spiritual](#) refer to the [New Testament](#) concept of [salvation](#) through [Jesus Christ](#). The Balm of Gilead is interpreted as a spiritual medicine that is able to heal Israel (and sinners in general

A version of the refrain can be found in Washington Glass's 1854 hymn "**The Sinner's Cure.**" **It was said that Washington** Glass penned this hymn himself, but most likely a collaboration with the words, sentiments and experiences of other. In his hymn, he makes reference to [John Newton](#)'s hymns with this refrain:

There is balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole;
There's power enough in heaven,
To cure a sin-sick soul.

John Newton's poem says:

How lost was my condition
Till Jesus made me whole!
There is but one Physician
Can cure a sin-sick soul.

The similarities in the refrain make it likely that it was written for Newton's verse.

APPLICATION: Tell the story somehow! Make it your duty to spread the good news of salvation. Perhaps by text, by call, by letter, by social media, by whatever means God has blessed us to have. In the new year we will be asking you to take on the “assignment” of a soul – through prayer, contact and invitation to the Kingdom. During this season, pray about who that may be!