

BREAK THOU THE BREAD OF LIFE

Mary Artemisia Lathbury & Alexander Groves

This hymn was written by Mary Artemisia Lathbury (1841-1913) & Alexander Groves (1842-1909) in 1877 for the Chautauqua Assembly, which began three years earlier as a summer camp for training Sunday School teachers. The Chautauqua Assembly continues, although it has become secularised ... It has been visited by four US Presidents Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Bill Clinton ... and musicians John-Philip Sousa, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Michael Jackson. It began though as a Christian education centre, about eighty miles south-west of the Niagara Falls.

Mary Lathbury was a Methodist, - her father was a Methodist Minister, as were her two brothers. She was a professional artist, a poet, an author, and a French teacher. She founded a Methodist Sunday School organisation. She worked tirelessly for the “Women’s Christian Temperance Union”, as well as taking part in the Chautauqua Assembly. She also wrote over sixty hymns, the most famous being “Break Thou the Bread of Life”, the music for which was composed by a Baptist, William Fisk Sherwin (1826-88).

The purpose of “Break Thou the Bread of Life” was as a ‘study hymn’. So, let’s look at it from that perspective.

Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me, As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea; Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord; My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!	Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me, Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me; Give me to eat and live with Thee above; Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love.
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Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me, As Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee; Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall; And I shall find my peace, my all in all.	O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me, That He may touch my eyes, and make me see: Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word, And in Thy Book revealed I see the Lord.
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Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means ‘house of bread’, and He described Himself as the ‘Bread of Life’ (John 6:32,33,38). In the opening fourteen verses of this chapter is the only miracle mentioned in all four Gospels, “The Feeding of the Five Thousand”, - relating to **Jn. 6:10 ... the men sat down, in number about five thousand**. However, the complete number including women and children could have been anything in excess of twenty thousand. This was the greatest recorded number of people who met Jesus. Also, since He created a meal for them, they were not merely spectators, but participants in the miracle because they ate the meal.

This miracle was the introduction to how He would present Himself later in the chapter, **Jn. 6:35** *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. ... It is true we become what we eat. When our body needs energy, we eat food. There is 'healthy food', and there is 'junk food'. Both will, - in the short term, - produce energy ... but healthy food provides the kind of energy which enhances the operation of the body's complex systems. It strengthens the body's resilience against illness and increases its durability. Junk food, on the other hand, may taste good but it gradually over time contributes to the degeneration of the body.*

Relate this to the Christian faith ... What you 'eat', you become. What you take in forms your development. Indulge yourself on spiritual 'junk food', and it will be to your spiritual detriment. ... Eat well, spiritually, and you will grow well, spiritually. ... Jesus used this same analogy when He was teaching His disciples to pray, **Mt. 6:11** *Give us this day our daily bread ...* And as the hymnwriter says, "My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word ... Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me ... Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me ... Teach me to love Thy truth ... Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word, And in Thy Book revealed I see the Lord."

"Give me to eat and live with Thee above" ... You feed on God's Word by hearing and listening to it, reading it, studying it, memorising it, and meditating on it. ... Many Christians find it profitable using, for example, a devotional. However, no matter how good the devotional, it is God's Word alone which **II Tim. 3:16** ... *is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.* ... You can trust *implicitly* what the Bible says and teaches. You don't need to wonder if it is right or wrong. Neither do you have to ask yourself if it is relevant for today. Nor do you have to complement it with other sources for **Ps. 12:6** *The words of the LORD are pure words ... In and of itself, the Bible needs nothing else for there is no other Book its equal, Is. 40:8* *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever ... I Peter 1:25* *the word of the Lord endureth for ever ...*

You will not find contradictions or mistakes in God's Word. You will not find discrepancies for it is truth from beginning to end ... In case anyone doubts its opening verses, the psalmist writes, **Ps. 119:160** *Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.* It is accurate from start to finish. ... Whereas some might say all religions are the same for they all lead to God, that is not true because the Bible makes it very clear, **Ps. 18:31** *For who is*

God save the LORD? ... **Ps. 86:10** For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone ... **Neh. 9:6** Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein. These are uncompromising pronouncements.

And God has proved His Word in the promises He has made. Many of them have already come to pass as literally given ... prophecies such as Jesus born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, dwelling in Galilee, the opposition to Him, events leading up to His arrest and conviction, His death, His resurrection, His ascension ... all literally fulfilled as God decreed in His Word. You never have to doubt its accuracy, and while God has already fulfilled many of the promises He made, some are being fulfilled today, and the remainder *will* be fulfilled.

It confounds and frustrates the doubters for they cannot explain the Bible's achievements. ... Worldwide, over 100 million copies are sold each year. The complete Bible has been translated into over 530 languages, and portions of it have been translated into almost 2,900 languages. The King James Version contains 788,258 words, 31,102 verses, 1,189 chapters, 66 books ... Over a period of approximately 1,500 years, God inspired more than forty writers, - men and women, - to write, among them shepherds, kings, a queen, farmers, priests, scribes, fishermen, doctors, tax-collector, Pharisee. It records events which took place in three continents, - Asia, Africa, Europe. It is the best-selling Book *ever* in history, with over an estimated five billion copies sold ... and still it remains one unified Book, with one unified message. ... It is God's Word, from beginning to end. It is **Heb. 4:12** ... quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And no matter how much you read and study it, there is always more to explore. Each time you come to it, the Holy Spirit being your Teacher, He shows you truths you never noticed, even in familiar passages of the Word. ... He is always teaching, **Ps. 119:103** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ... And when the psalmist came to the Word, he was revived in his own spirit, **Ps. 119:9** Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. ... And he kept it with him, **Ps. 119:11** Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee ... **Ps. 119:130** The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

That is the best way to come to God's Word ... not considering yourself an expert, but as a student wanting and willing to learn. As a believer, this Book is

your road-map for it is like a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path (Ps. 119:105). And as long as you keep to the leading of God's Word, you will never become lost for it will guide you the whole way through life, until the Lord calls you home. ... You will need the light along those very unpleasant dark tunnels that almost close in and constrict you, and that is when you will understand what the Psalmist means, **Ps. 119:50** *This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.* ... He would have despaired, had it not been for the direction God's Word was leading Him ... And as King Solomon said, as he stood in front of the congregation of Israel, **I Kings 8:56** *Blessed be the Lord ... there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised.*

That illustrates the *indestructability* of God's Word! It can never be 'knocked off its stride', **Ps. 119:89** *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* It shows how God's plan is operating from the commencement to the conclusion. Even with all the attacks against it, it 'rides high' on being the absolute Word of God. It has suffered more viciously, it has had countless attempts to destroy and discredit it, opponents from the dawn of history to the present day lambast it ... but the truth of God's Word continues to withstand them all.

It has been proved true by science, archaeology and history. Yes, of course, atheistic scientists pour scorn on God's Word, choosing instead the obscure and fantastic theories of men which change with the generations. They mock the Bible as primitive, with old-fashioned out-of-date practices ... and they 'fall over themselves' to replace what the Bible teaches with their own laws and then they wonder why the world is in such a chaotic and frightening state ... It is simply because they have rejected what the Word of God proclaims.

No matter what they say, the Bible has transformed countless lives and cultures. The Bible has changed more people than anything else. No matter how it is attacked, it remains as infallible, as inerrant, as inspired of the Holy Spirit as ever, for as Jesus said, **Mt. 24:35** *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

So, that is how privileged we are. As the psalmist said thousands of years ago, - and it is still true, - **Ps. 119:140** *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.* ... You love it because it is like the Bread of Heaven to your soul **Ps. 119:162** *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.* ... And even though you enjoy reading other devotional books and aids, none compare with God's Word.

You can never read and study it enough. And when you come to a passage you don't immediately find easy to understand, you read and *work* at it until you do. Or maybe you come across something that might not sit well with you, - you're not sure if you agree or not ... Well, I can assure you, the fault is not with the Word, for God is always right! His Word is truth the whole way through!

And remember too, *this* is living food. As a Christian, you cannot be healthy if you don't feed on God's Word ... for you need the right food to grow, and here is the right food for you as a believer. As a babe in Christ, there's the milk ... and as you mature, there's the meat, **Mt. 5:6** *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

Junk food might be tasty, but it is no good for your growing up. From the Author comes the recommendation, **Mt. 4:4** *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* The old saying is true, "Sin will keep you from this Book, but this Book will keep you from sin." ... As the psalmist put it, **Ps. 119:101** *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word ... and it not only showed in his walk, but also in his talk ...* **172** *My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

If you are not saved and you want to know the Lord Jesus, His Word will bring you to Him. If you are a backslider, His Word will return you to Him. If you are a weary believer, He invites you to learn in His Word how you can become strong in Him. If you are enjoying the life God has blessed you with, give thanks to Him ... and watch and pray alongside the psalmist, **Ps. 119:133** *Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

"Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me."