

AUSTELL GRANDVIEW SDA CHURCH PRESENTS

# HERITAGE

A BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION



# PART III

## NEGRO SPIRITUALS | A HERITAGE OF MUSICAL WARFARE

BASED ON EPHESIANS CHAPTER 5:15-21

RICHARD MCNEIL

### “1807 Slave Bible”

<https://www.museumofthebible.org/exhibits/slave-bible>

"About 90% of the Old Testament is missing and 50% of the New Testament is missing,"

"There are 1,189 chapters in a standard protestant Bible. The Slave Bible contains only 232."

Passages that could encourage the Africans to revolt were removed, for example:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

And verses that seem to condone the institution of slavery were kept.

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." Ephesians 6:5

In 1807 – the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in England, That same year in America & the Caribbean, released the “Slave Bible” as a counter attack.

‘Selected Parts of the Holy Bible for the Use of the Negro Slaves in the British West-India Islands’.

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## **Spirituals on the life of Christ**

**"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow,"**

**"Go, Tell It on the Mountain,"**

**"Were You There?"**

## **Spirituals on the Christian life**

**"Lord, I Want to Be a Christian,"**

**"We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder,"**

**"Give Me Jesus,"**

**"I Want Jesus to Walk With Me,"**

**[ Video ]** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL7rLD1H3g0>

## **The real Gospel inspired Spirituals like**

**"There Is a Balm in Gilead,"**

**"Lord, Make Us More Holy,"**

**and on Communion "Let Us Break Bread Together."**

**Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,**

**Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen,**

**Go Down, Moses,**

**He's Got the Whole World in His Hand,**

**Kum Ba Ya,**

**Every Time I Feel the Spirit,**

**"This Little Light of Mine"; [ Video ]**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUKOS\\_cEXY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUKOS_cEXY)



In Colossians 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."

Ephesians 5:15-21 (NKJV)

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

**In Psalm 137**

**4 How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land?**

**While Israel chose give up their MUSIC in protest**

**Africans chose to keep their MUSIC and use it as a weapon!**

**SPIRITUALS are meant to build up those who are  
being treated as fools**

**SPIRITUALS are meant to build up those who have been given  
a false impression of the Will of God**

**SPIRITUALS - Are the WEAPONS of the WOUNDED against WICKED-  
NESS**

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**NEGRO SPIRITUALS, reflect the Africans' need to express their new faith:**

**Velma M. Thomas in her book "No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song" says,**

"My people told stories, from Genesis to Revelation, with God's faithful as the main characters. They knew about Adam and Eve in the Garden, about Moses and the Red Sea. They sang of the Hebrew children and Joshua at the battle of Jericho. They could tell you about Mary, Jesus, God, and the Devil. If you stood around long enough, you'd hear a song about the blind man seeing, God troubling the water, Ezekiel seeing a wheel, Jesus being crucified and raised from the dead. If slaves couldn't read the Bible, they would memorize Biblical stories they heard and translate them into songs." (Velma Maia Thomas. No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 14.)

## **UNIQUENESS TO THE STYLE OF NEGRO SPIRITUALS**

### **Call-and-Response**

where the lead would call out a phrase and the rest of the singers would respond with the same line.

### **Moaning**

These moans did not necessarily imply pain, but instead resembled humming and melodies.



## Secret Messages

Many Negro spirituals composed had double meanings. The lyrics contained secret messages that were only understood by the slaves to communicate with each other. Most popular coded spirituals refer to the Underground Railroad.

“Steal Away” – meant that a slave was planning to escape to freedom.

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” – refers to Harriet Tubman or a conductor coming to lead slaves to the North

“Wade in the Water” – refers to Harriet Tubman instructing slaves to move off the trail and into the water so that slave-catchers dog’s couldn’t trace their scent.

## Work Songs

Many NEGRO Spirituals were sung while slaves performed labor, in the fields, on railroads and construction. As long as these songs were not of rebellion, workers were allowed to sing to entertain themselves, or to help each other work in unity.

Mostly these work songs were sung to encourage each as they labored.

There is approximately 6,000 NEGRO SPIRITUALS;

But because of the oral tradition of the slaves’ ancestors

—and laws against slaves learning to read or write

—the actual number of songs is unknown.



“The best that we can do, however, with paper and types, or even with voices, will convey but a faint shadow of the original. The voices of the colored people have a peculiar quality that nothing can imitate; and the intonations and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper.” (William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, comp., *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York, A. Simpson, 1867; reprint, Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1995), iv- v.)

“Music is the most tangible transmitter of African-American spirituality, music plays second fiddle only to preaching in Black worship, with the two combining to create the minimum conditions for a fulfilling, elevating worship service.” (C Erie Lincoln and Lawrence H Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham Duke University Press, 1990), 346.)

“During slavery music was used to beckon the faithful to a predetermined spot for worship. Slaves understood that music helped to create a feeling of freedom, awaken an awareness of God's presence, and created an atmosphere in which God's grace could be experienced.” ( Costen, 45)

“... the spirituals are available to all persons who are prepared to open themselves to the unsettling, healing power that inhabits these marvelous songs of life. These songs were created out of “deeply meaningful, archetypally human experiences, relevant not only to the specific circumstances of slavery but also to women and men struggling with issues of justice, freedom and spiritual wholeness in all times and places.” (Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in The Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), xi.)

"The heart is the place where true change begins. The path to understanding our racial legacy passes through our shared joys, pains, and sorrows, not by painfully forgetting or fearfully ignoring them. Learning to love, teach, and especially, to sing solo spirituals brings us closer to humbly reconciling the truth of what we are, together." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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