

Night With Ebon Pinion

Ponder: What is an ebon pinion, and why is it brooding o'er the vale?

Scripture: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44, NKJV).

Love Humphreys Jameson wrote the words to this great song in 1854. Seventeen years later, Joseph P. Powell set it to music. Many of us have sung it regularly in church for decades. It pertains to the thrice-repeated prayer of our Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane just before Judas brought the mob to arrest Him.

The melody is hauntingly beautiful in its own right; but this song's value is based not on the magnificence of its melody, but on the meaning of its message. Since we are to understand what we sing (1 Corinthians 14:15), let's look in particular at the opening words which, in part, comprise the title also.

"Night with ebon pinion" – ebon is an abbreviated form of ebony, a dark, tropical hardwood. The word may be used to describe anything that is very dark or black.

Pinion technically refers to the outer end of a bird's wing, but when used in literature it refers to the entire wing. Our song's writer, then, was portraying the night as having black wings as Jesus prayed in the garden.

That dark night, he says, "brooded o'er the vale." The word hovered describes well what brooded means, and of course "the vale" (valley) would refer to the Kidron Valley from which Jesus and the disciples ascended to the Mount of Olives where the Garden of Gethsemane was. The night with dark, black wings hovering over the valley gives a sense of foreboding that fits very well with the emotions of our Lord as He agonized in prayer, the cross looming ever nearer.

When we sing this beloved hymn, let us feel the apprehension Jesus felt that night so long ago. Let us deepen our appreciation for His unlimited love for us and His flawless faithfulness to our Heavenly Father as He prayed, "Not My will, but Yours be done."

He pleaded that the cup of suffering might pass from Him; but it could not. He drank it, full strength, every last drop. Otherwise, we could not be saved.

Hallelujah! What a savior!