

nation) will come not through might, but through confident trust and obedience to God.

1CR 15.56-58 ~ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

CONCLUSION: Vs. 4 – “refresh Thy People”

However, while God is the granter of the victory, that doesn’t mean it’ll always be easy. It can, in fact, be exhausting. Fighting day by day by day can wear us out. For that reason, notice the words of the final verse:

*Refresh thy people on their toilsome way;
Lead us from night to never ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine!*

EX: Daniel calls to the **“God of his fathers”**, whose **almighty hand** was used to **lead** His people and to **defeat** His enemies to also **refresh His people**. It’s a call for encouragement and strength—no so that we can stop working, but rather, so that we can keep on working!

MT 11.28-30 ~ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Notice here: God provides for us a comfort, and a work. He provides for us a task to do, but He also refreshes us not and in the time to come. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2CR 1.3-4)*

At our nation’s 100 year anniversary, churches began singing this song: praising God in His might, calling for His leadership, taking comfort in His victory of their enemies in war and in peace, and calling for refreshment of His people that, again, they can be led again. All to the **“God of Our Fathers”**, and His **“almighty hand”**.

2TH 2.13-17 ~ *But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*

INVITATION

#645 [HYMN]
06/30/2025

HYMN HISTORY #49: God of our Fathers

HYMN

PC Pchd

QUESTION: What lessons can we learn from the song, “God of Our Fathers”?

TRN TO 1CH 16

INTRODUCTION

HOLIDAY/Independence Day/Semiquincentennial Preparations – Pt 1

HOLIDAY/Independence Day/Semiquincentennial Preparations – Pt 2

HOLIDAY/Independence Day/Semiquincentennial Preparations – Pt 3

Whatever your politics, it will certainly be interesting to see the planning and execution of the Semiquincentennial festivals this year. Few of us remember the last big American anniversary—the Bicentennial in 1976. If rumors are to be believed, this will rival it in scope and in size.

BACKGROUND

HOLIDAY/Independence Day/Centennial Festival

I must admit, while I’m not the kind of person to go **“all out”** each Independence Day (we spent this year’s driving back from Florida and cursing the fireworks in our hotel), I wish I could have seen the Centennial or Bicentennial festivals. Their spectacle and wonder seem amazing to me, and I’ve have loved to have been able to walk the aisles of the Fairmount Park fair and see the different displays and presentation.

Some of these are going to attempt to be recreated and reborn today: festivals, parades, and fairs. But those are only the larger, more dramatic and official aspects of the holiday. We cannot speak of the smaller, more intimate celebrations thrown across the nation in communities, congregations, and families, as they gathered in their own small and special ways to celebrate their country’s anniversary.

Daniel C. Roberts was 35 years old, and served as **“rector”** (the term for a **“Priest”** in the Episcopal church) for a small rural church in the farmlands of Brandon, Vermont. The local town was known for providing waterpower, iron ore, and marble—well suited during the rise of the railroad in 1849. As the Centennial approached, he sought to write a simple hymn for his congregation. This hymn, originally set to the tune, **“Russian Hymn”**, was well received, prompted him to send it in, anonymously, to his denomination’s General Convention as they were revising their official hymnal. It was approved, its author originally recorded as **“Anonymus”**. Then, when time came for to choose a hymn for the celebration of the Centennial of the US Constitution. With some minor changes (moving from **“Russian Hymn”** to a new tune called, **“National Hymn”**), the hymn was officially selected, and survives with this revised melody even today.

Most don’t recognize it, today, as a hymn of the American Bicentennial. And, in my opinion, that’s for the best. For unlike some, which almost seem to raise the nation, itself, up as an idol, this song puts it in its proper place: as a temporary home where we are blessed to live and to serve the **“God of our Fathers”**.

BD1: Vs. 1 – “Whose Almighty Hand”

So many of our modern hymns and art begins by looking within—looking at the good things God has done for us. And there is a place for this! But Roberts doesn’t

begin looking within. He begins, with triumphal chord structure, to look with awe and majesty at **the almighty hand of the God of our Fathers**.

*God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
Our grateful songs before Thy throne arise.*

Both Roberts and the Hebrew writer shared a reverent awe for the **“God of their Fathers whose almighty hand”** had guided—had shepherded—His people. Roberts points to the marching of the stars, planets, and galaxies above him which God effortlessly moves forth.

1CH 16.23-27 ~ *Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place.*

AP: When we look at the stars above us, their clockwork precision and effortless moving, how can we help but marvel at the **“God of our Fathers”** who uses His almighty hand to guide and lead forth them. What an awesome God we have!

JD 25 ~ *To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

BD2: Vs. 2 – “Has Led Us in the Past”

*Thy love divine hath led us in the past,
In this free land by Thee our lot is cast;
Be Thou our Ruler, Guardian, Guide, and Stay,
Thy Word our law, Thy paths our chosen way.*

Perhaps when he wrote this, Roberts was thinking of the fathers of our country. In truth, the faith of the American Founders could vary—some believing in the inspiration and almighty power of God, others being more **“socially Christian”**. For that reason, when I sing this song, my mind naturally turns to **HB 11**—to our father, Enoch, who was lifted up by the mighty hand of God and prevented from the pains of death (**vs. 5**). To our father, Noah: whom God delivered through the waters of the flood (**vs. 7**). To our father, Abraham, to who God delivered an inheritance (**vs. 8-12**). To our father, Moses, whom God protected in the river, and guided back to Egypt to guide His people and hold back the waters of the Red Sea. (**vs. 23-29**)

HB 11.32-38 ~ *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets — ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was*

not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

AP: God has led His people in the past—and I’m not simply speaking of His people in the Bible. He’s led all who would place His word as their law, and Him as their **“Guardian, Guide, and Stay”**.

PS 32.8 ~ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

PS 119.105-106 ~ *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules.*

BD3: Vs. 3 – “From War’s Alarms”

While Daniel Roberts was born on November 5th, 1841 in Long Island, New York, he was living in Ohio (where he was being educated at the time) when the Civil War broke out. Being a youth in his early 20s, he joined the 84th Ohio Volunteers and joined the Union army. Not much is recorded of his time at war, but I find it hard to imagine that it didn’t inform his preaching and hymn. For when he wrote **“God of Our Fathers”**, the 3rd verse begins:

*From war’s alarms, from deadly pestilence,
Be Thy strong arm our ever-sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase,
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.*

EX: As a civil war veteran, he’d likely spent many a day marching and long night sleeping out in the field—uncertain if he’d survive the next day’s battle. But, blessedly, he had. And now, looking back, he placed his survival of all the worst alarms and struggles squarely at the feet of His God.

B.III—The Battle Against Jehoshaphat (2CH 20.1-14) (king of Judah; great multitude coming from Edom against him; afraid, sought the Lord) *For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. (2CH 20.12)* I have to say, I understand his anxiety: to be the king of a small people against the armies of multiple nations: **what chance would he have?**

AP: Today, we can similarly be afraid: as nations turn against His church, and even as we hear the threat of wars all around us. It can be frightening—and it’s natural for us to worry!

2CH 20.15-17 ~ *And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s. ¹⁶ Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. ¹⁷ You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you.”*

God uses His mighty hand to set an ambush against Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—the armies of Judah didn’t even need to raise their hands. They won not through their wisdom or through their might, but through the hand of the **“God of their Fathers”**. And that is the same, today. Our victory as His people (not our