

# “Understandest Thou What Thou Singest?” – No. 1

Dub McClish

The New Testament evangelist, Philip, asked the Ethiopian Bible student, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30). This question is also appropriate to ask concerning the “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” we sing in our assemblies. Paul stated that we should sing with “understanding” as we praise God and His Son (1 Cor. 14:15). The context of this passage shows that some, with the gift of tongues, were singing in a language not understood by others, hence they could not all sing with understanding. Sometimes we sing words that may as well be in a foreign tongue for all the understanding we have of their meaning. Such misunderstandings are caused by several factors, including figures of speech, archaic terminology, terms that are rarely used, failure to properly read a word, ignorance of Bible teaching mentioned in a song, and likely other factors. Perhaps, the following notes will help us better understand what we are singing.

1. In the song, “Higher Ground,” we sing of “heaven’s table-land.” This refers to a broad, level area, such as a plateau, which will be above this world and all its cares and trials.
2. In the song, “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” the second verse speaks of “cloven skies,” which does not refer to a spicy aroma, but to skies that are opened or separated.
3. In “The Great Physician” we sing of the “seraph song.” “Seraph” is an abbreviated term for “seraphim,” high-ranking angels (Isa. 6:2, 6).
4. When we sing of the “rose of Sharon,” we are not singing of a girl who has a thorny-stemmed flower. “Sharon” is the name of the plain along the Mediterranean Seacoast stretching from Mt. Carmel northward and to Joppa southward. “Jesus, Rose of Sharon,” is based upon the statement in Song of Solomon 2:1: “I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys.” It is intended to figuratively convey the attractiveness of Christ.
5. If you shout and sing “hosannas” to Christ, just what are you doing (“Just Over in the Glory Land”)? “Hosanna” is a Greek word spelled in English letters (transliterated), meaning, “Save, we pray!” It was the cry of acclamation that went up from the multitudes that accompanied the Lord into Jerusalem at His “Triumphal Entry” (Mat. 21:9).
6. A prophet whose pillow was a stone is mentioned in “Mansion Over the Hilltop.” This “prophet” was Jacob who was fleeing from the wrath of Esau and pillowed his head on a stone at Luz/Beth-el, a place he just passed through on his way to another land (Gen. 28:10-19).
7. In “Wonderful Love of Jesus” we sing of raising “lays” to Jesus in praise. “Lay” is an archaic term for a song, thus, this hymn speaks of our attempts to praise Christ with spiritual songs.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, August 13, 1987, of which I was editor.]

**Attribution:** From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.