

STRAIGHT PATHS

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"...and make straight paths for your feet..." Hebrews 12:13

EDITORIAL

"Gather up the fragments that remain," said our Lord after feeding the five thousand, "that nothing may be lost". Despite his supernatural power to create food when needed, the Lord did not condone wastage. Abundance does not contradict the values of thrift, productivity and efficiency. Much benefit is obtained from the sacrifice of others, and we must respect this.

The Lord Jesus humbled himself and suffered immensely when he came to this earth to fulfil the Father's desire to save us. But in the Father's plan, the Lord's incarnation had dignity - there were visitors at his birth, which angels announced. Thomson B Thomas describes these visits in the Jesus feature. In Life Issues, Eby Varghese explains the sacrifice and value of giving. In Apologetics, we learn how many of the so called vestigial organs, maligned for being useless, were later found to be useful. Our bodies are examples of efficient design, not inefficient evolution. In Hymn Stories, we learn of an ancient hymn that was picked from the sands of history, and recast to provide further blessing to many. In Missions, we learn of a Chinese Christian of Korean descent who sacrificed his life to disciple and evangelise North Koreans. In the Gospel we see that God brings us the hope of a life that is truly productive for eternity.

As we read this edition of Straight Paths, may God help us to order our lives so that they are truly valuable.

Johnny Varghese.

Johnny Varghese

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STRAIGHT PATHS

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

Vestigial Organs

JOHNNY VARGHESE

In the previous articles of this series, we have been examining the evidence that scientists offer for the theory of evolution, the atheist explanation for the origin of life. In the last article, we considered several cases of vestigial structures, supposed vestiges or remnants of an organism's evolutionary past that are now less functional. In this article, we will examine vestigial organs as evidence for evolution and in the light of the biblical model of origins. We make several key observations.

In his book *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin claimed about a dozen human features to be vestigial. A few decades later, the German anatomist Robert Wiedersheim expanded Darwin's list of "useless organs" to 86 [1]. Evolutionists presented Wiedersheim's vestigial organs as one of the so-called "proofs" of evolution in the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925.

Men (and women) have a coccyx (the segment consisting of the last few vertebrae), which seemed useless (at least to 19th-century biologists). It looks a little like a tail, so (goes the argument) we must have evolved from ape-like ancestors with tails.

Well, men also have nipples that look similar to female nipples (both human and animal), which serve a function that male nipples don't. Does this imply that humans have evolved from an ancestor whose male used to suckle its young?

We see that the evolutionary argument is inconsistent. If male nipples don't prove that we descended from male ancestors suckling their young, there could be other explanations for other vestigial organs, too. After dismissing nearly 100 organs as useless, harming patients by removing some of them, and earning a lot), the scientific community eventually found uses for these once "vestigial" organs:

Coccyx: It anchors the pelvic diaphragm

Appendix: It is a repository of good bacteria with which our gut needs to be repopulated after a stomach infection. Darwin suggested that the human appendix is vestigial. He thought it was a relic of the caecum, which some mammals have. However, since humans have a well-developed caecum as well as an appendix, the appendix can hardly be considered a vestigial caecum. The critical point is that the presence or absence of an appendix (or a caecum) reveals no evolutionary pattern whatsoever. The appendix is found, for example, in rabbits and some marsupials such as the wombat, but is not found in dogs, cats, horses, or ruminants.

Hip bones in whales: They help penis erection in the males and vaginal contraction in the females.

The Adipose fin: University of Victoria biologist Tom Reimchen, reasoning that the adipose fin would not persist "for 60 million years unless it had some use," decided to investigate. He found that the removal of the fin forced fish to expend more energy to swim.

The plica semilunaris: This small fold at the inner corner of the human eye secretes the sticky substance that hardens into the crust we sometimes find around our eyes when we wake up. This substance surrounds any particles that find their way into the eye, making them less likely to scratch the eye and making it easier for the tears and eyelids to remove the particles from the eye. This organ thus protects our eyes.

An expanded list would include all the examples that Wiedersheim gave. This change in status illustrates the logical principle that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Just because we can't find any function of an organ, it does not mean that it has no function.

To salvage the vestigial organ argument, evolutionists altered the definition.

The standard definition of 'vestigial' is an organ that once was useful in an animal's evolutionary past but that now is useless or very close to useless. Many organs lost their vestigial status as scientists stumbled upon their functions. To salvage the vestigial-organ argument for evolution, biologists changed the definition. According to the new definition, a vestigial organ is any part of an organism that has diminished in size during its evolution because the function it served decreased in importance or became unnecessary.

This definition is vague because terms like "decrease in importance" are subjective. The human jaw is smaller and weaker than the ape's jaw. Does this mean that the human jaw is vestigial?

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The revised definition makes the vestigial argument very similar to the homology argument—that different organisms must have a common ancestor if they have similar structures or body plans. We will deal with this argument separately. Here, we only mention the concept of design economy. To keep things simple, a designer will use the same body plan for multiple models. Engineers do this for different variants of the same car model, and this is a probable explanation for features such as male nipples and the wings of flightless birds, among others.

Yet another revisionist's definition suggests that any 'organ or structure that lacks function related to the animal's survival' should be labeled as vestigial.

According to this definition, even human abilities such as singing and dancing are considered vestigial. Some modern flowering plants (such as dandelions) are self-pollinating and, consequently, do not need flowers. Thus, dandelion flowers are vestigial. Yet, like music and dance, a field of dandelion flowers is a delight. It seems that the living world is not a result of natural selection (survival of the fittest) but the result of the creative acts of a God who is interested in aesthetics and enjoyment.

There are instances where the function is not immediately apparent.

Ear muscles, Palmaris longus muscle: Since muscles atrophy drastically when the organism does not use them, it follows that if these muscles are intact in a human, they must have some use, although we don't know it.

Wings on flightless birds: Possible functions include balance while running, cooling in hot weather, warmth in cold weather, protection of the rib cage in falls, mating rituals, scaring predators, and sheltering of chicks.

Some cases of vestigial organs are a clear case of loss of function. For example, blind cavefish with deformed eyes are descendants of seeing fish. Typically, a blind fish would not be good at surviving and, hence, unlikely to pass on its genes and propagate in the population. But in a dark, deep-ocean cave, functioning eyes don't confer any advantage. Scientists also found that a control gene, hedgehog, which affects several processes, including the development of the jaws and taste buds, also inhibits another control gene, pax6, which controls the development of the eyes. Thus, cavefish can trade their eyes for stronger jaws and better taste buds, and this is a net advantage in a dark cave [2].

Blind fish with vestigial eyes only show that we are living in a fallen, cursed world. They don't show that seeing eyes developed in a world of eyeless creatures (the evolutionary claim).

Wisdom Teeth (Third Molars):

After Darwin, evolutionists used to believe that wisdom teeth were vestigial remnants from our ape-like ancestors, who had larger jaws. The argument was that evolution contracted our jaws but not our teeth - hence the misfit. The first challenge to this view came when researchers found that humans have the smallest third molars (among all the primates).

In the 19th century, scientists used to think that if organisms don't use an organ, their offspring will have a less functional version of the organ (if a population does not run, their children will be born with weaker legs). This idea (called Lamarckian evolution) has now been discredited. Thus, informed evolutionists today will not claim that as ape-men ate roasted meat (easier to chew) instead of raw meat, their jaws contracted.

Evolutionists now believe that if a mutation causes some offspring to be born with smaller jaws, then this trait will be preserved and propagated if smaller jaws have some advantage. No one has so far identified such an advantage. So what is going on?

Researchers also found that wisdom teeth problems are more prevalent in developed societies where the food is soft than in primitive societies where the food is abrasive (and leads to tooth wear). For most of human history, life has been hard - the food would wear the teeth, and wisdom teeth were a welcome backup [3]. Now that we eat refined, soft food, our teeth don't wear out in our youth, and there's no room for wisdom teeth [4].

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Conclusion: Vestigial organs fall into a few categories:

Organs with known functions – they are not vestiges of something else; the Creator made them as they are with the purpose that they fulfill (examples: the coccyx and the appendix).

Organs with no known function – we may have to wait for their function to be discovered (for example, ear muscles).

Organs with obvious loss of function: Example: the eyes of blind cavefish. These illustrate how degeneration has occurred in nature as a consequence of the Fall. They don't show how eyes could arise in a world without eyes or wings could arise in a wingless world.

Organs with modern functional counterparts: For example, male nipples, vestigial remains of female genitals in males, and vice versa. These show the design economy of the Creator. He used standard blueprints for both males and females, as well as standard blueprints for various living things.

Vestigial organs show the decay that has taken place in nature since Noah's Flood. They also show human arrogance in concluding that organs are useless too soon and human stubbornness in changing the definition when the discoveries of function became an embarrassment. They do not provide evidence that a unicellular organism has evolved to humans. We close with a quote from an evolutionary biologist.

“Since it is not possible to unambiguously identify useless structures, and since the structure of the argument used is not scientifically valid, I conclude that 'vestigial organs' provide no special evidence for the theory of evolution.” [5]

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VISITORS IN BETHLEHEM

THOMSON B THOMAS

Jesus was born in very ordinary circumstances. When Augustus Caesar had ordered that all should be registered in their respective native towns for taxation, Joseph, taking Mary along with him, went to Bethlehem. Dr. Luke, an accomplished historian, records, “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (2:4-7). This is a simple record of the birth of Jesus.

There, at their arrival in Bethlehem, we are told, they lodged in an ‘inn’ (2.7). The word used here is not the usual word used for an inn. The word used here means ‘shelter’. It probably was an old house. Some think that it was Chimham’s house (Jeremiah 41:17; 2 Samuel 19:37-40). Chimham was the son of Barzillai. When David was returning from his wanderings because of the uprising of Absalom, Barzillai came to receive David. The king asked him to go with him to his kingdom. But he refused, and sent his son with David. He arranged a place for himself in Bethlehem. As per tradition, that became the shelter for Jesus’ birth.

According to Palestinian custom, houses typically had two levels: a lower level and an upper level. On a higher level, people usually slept at night. The lower level was usually reserved for their things and animals. The ‘manger’ mentioned here is this lower level of the house. That is the place where cattle were kept. Their feeding trough became the first bed for Jesus. The place was very unpretentious and ordinary.

When a child is born, in the normal course, people, close friends, and relatives who come to know about the birth would come visiting. But at the birth of Jesus, there were no visitors from kith and kin. But God arranged a couple of visitors, one from the same vicinity and the second from far, from the East. Mathew and Luke narrate these visits.

Shepherds of Bethlehem

Shepherds watching over their sheep in the night at Bethlehem were given the message about the birth of Jesus. God sent His angels to them with the message. This fact is amazing. There were greater men around, such as Herod, the high priests, and elders of the Jewish community, among many others. But God overlooked them and sent the angels to the shepherds.

Luke says, “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (2:8-14).

These shepherds might have been looking after the sheep that were kept for the sacrifice in the Temple. Such sheep were kept in the open even in winter. The angel was sent to these shepherds. This spectacular event in the field at night was amazing. The shekinah glory dazzled in the field. The angel, probably Gabriel, announced the good news of Jesus’ birth. A host from heaven joined the angel in singing glory to God. There is a Jewish tradition that says this field was the place where Ruth met Boaz.

Luke continues, “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger” (vv. 15,16). Some of the shepherds might have stayed back to look after their sheep. Those who went saw the Shepherd of their lives, and those who stayed back saw their sheep!

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Wise men from the East

Matthew narrates this episode of the visit of the Magi, that is, the wise men from the East (2:1-12). Myths and traditions have added many details to the narrative of the Magi. A medieval understanding of the story claimed that these men were kings, three in number. Even their names are supposedly known - Casper, Balthazar, and Melchior. Some believe they represented Noah’s sons. A twelfth-century church leader even claimed to have discovered the skull of one of the Magi! But the Bible is silent about these. It does not even say that they were three in number.

They saw the star denoting the birth of a king in Israel. They assumed that the king would be born in the palace in Jerusalem. They arrived there. But Herod had no inkling about the matters. He summoned the scribes, the experts in the scriptures. They informed Him from the scriptures that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Thus, they were directed to Bethlehem.

When they started from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star appeared again and went before them till they reached the house where Jesus was laid. “They presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). These were some of the precious things from their country. As these things were commonly found in Arab countries, many think that these wise men were from some part of the Arab world.

Herod the Great thought that the birth of a king would be a threat to his position. Herod had asked the wise men to come back to him and report the whereabouts of the king. He planned to eliminate the child. But they went back by another way, being directed by God. Later, the king massacred all the male children in and around Bethlehem below two years of age, intending to kill the child Jesus.

SUFFERINGS AND GLORY

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

Trials and troubles are often our portion for the present life. In the book of Romans, where Paul presents his most systematic and orderly treatise of the gospel, the topic of suffering is also included. This shows that sufferings are expected in everyone's life. Faith in the Lord Jesus does not guarantee a trouble-free life. When sufferings come, they give us opportunities to be faithful in adverse situations and become worthy of honour and praise at His coming. In Romans 8:18-27, Paul makes the bold statement that the present sufferings have no comparison with the future glory and gives reasons for holding this view.

Greatness of Future Glory

Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (v.18). The sufferings of the present time have no comparison to the coming glory. The glory far exceeds the suffering. When the going gets tough, we must set our eyes on the glory at the destination. Elsewhere, Paul gloried in tribulation, knowing the good it brings in our present life (5:3-5). James also wrote in similar lines (James 1:3, 4). These scriptures indicate that suffering serves a greater good, both in the present and in the future.

Reasons for the Expectation

The expectation that the future glory shall be far exceeding in greatness is reasoned out in verses 19 to 27. When suffering comes, our focus is normally on it, resulting in frustration. The world can only sit and brood over problems. But believers can rejoice and sing even in prison cells. There are reasons in the present and future as well for rejoicing. Paul lists certain reasons for rejoicing.

Firstly, the Expectation of the Creation, vv. 19-22. Paul says, "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

The creation groans. It is subject to vanity. It is in the bondage of corruption because of the fall of Adam (Gen. 3:17, 18). When it was subjected to vanity, it was not subjected without hope. The hope anticipated was the liberation through the 'Seed of the woman.' If the bondage came by the fall of man, the liberation shall come with their restoration. The hope of it was given at the fall itself (Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20).

The 'groanings of the creation' may be identified with the increase of the natural calamities we witness these days. It is compared to birth pangs. Just as there is hope for a woman in travail, there is hope for creation. It shall be liberated from the curse of the original fall. This expectation of the creation indicates that the children of God, all believers, shall appear in glory, and that glory shall far exceed the sufferings in weight.

Secondly, the Hope of the Believers, vv. 23-25. Paul reasons, "Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."

The proclamation of the gospel includes the hope of inheritance (Col. 1:5). Our Hope is not in the things we see. What we see is temporal, not eternal. We wait for the adoption, the redemption of the body, which shall occur at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Then shall the believers enter and enjoy the inheritance the Lord has reserved for them (Eph. 1:5, 11).

Even after trusting the Lord, the body of the believers is still dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10). But they have received the guarantee of redemption, the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:14). This assures that the Lord shall fulfil what the Lord has begun in us in redemption. Elsewhere, Paul says that hope does not make us ashamed. It means the Lord shall fulfil the hope He has given us through His Son. If God has assured us of future glory by giving us His Spirit, then the glory shall be greater than the present sufferings.

Thirdly, the Help of the Comforter, vv. 26,27. Paul continues, "Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

The help the believer receives from the ministry of the Holy Spirit is highlighted here. The groaning of the Spirit makes our groanings in suffering. With these groanings, He makes intercession for us. The 'infirmities' may be the lowest points of our lives in grief, where we do not know what to say or do. When suffering overwhelms us, we are at our wits' end. In such situations, when we kneel to pray, even the best of our prayers fall short of the standard of God. In such predicaments, the Spirit comes with His help in intercession. If God gives us such succor and help, it is not for nothing but for great glory.

If heaven's help is extended to a Christian, in such a measure, it indicates that the destination shall be great and glorious. We may reckon that the sufferings are nothing in comparison to the coming glory. Let's set our eyes on eternity and progress in Christian life, though at times the pathway may be foggy and slippery.

MISSIONS

HAN CHUNG-RYEOL

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

We don't know much about Han Chung Ryeol's early life. He was born and raised in China as a Chinese citizen, but his ethnic origins were Korean. He studied theology at East-North Theological Seminary in Shenyang, China. In 1993, at the age of 26, he moved with his wife to a Chinese town called Changbai to pastor a church comprised of ethnic Koreans. Changbai was not far from China's border with North Korea. In the nineties, the repressive policies of North Korea's communist dictatorship resulted in famine. The situation was made worse by the collapse of the Soviet Union (which would help North Korea). Experts estimate that between 300,000 and 1.2 million North Koreans died during the famine. The borders were porous, and North Koreans began sneaking into China, looking for food, medical help, money, and a better life.

Han Chung's ministry focus was not on North Koreans but on Chinese people of Korean descent, like himself. But he realized that he couldn't turn a blind eye to the North Korean fugitives who were showing up. The fugitives would initially expect help from their distant relatives on the Chinese side. However, they would be disappointed to learn that their relatives either lacked the resources to help or were afraid to get involved. Soon the word spread along the North Korean mountain trails: "Look for a building with a cross".

"It didn't matter if we wanted to do North Korean work or not," Mrs. Han said, "they just keep coming. When you see them you can't get away from doing this ministry. When they come to China they are really starving; that is why they come. They don't have clothes. When you meet them face to face there is no way you don't want to do anything."

The Hans helped the North Koreans with their material needs and presented the gospel to them. Many North Koreans would try to escape their country with the hope of reaching South Korea, which accepts them as citizens. However, Han Chung told the North Koreans he discipled that he wanted them to go back to North Korea and take the gospel to their friends and relatives. He did not want them to go to an unknown materialistic place like South Korea, and this is perhaps why the Chinese authorities tolerated him.

The Hans got their first taste of the sinister workings of North Korea's government when Mrs Han went there on a legal visit in 1998. She gave rice to orphanages and some of their contacts. In North Korea's communist culture, helping is usually done only with a vested interest. So, the North Korean government viewed her actions with suspicion and arrested her. They repeatedly interrogated and starved her in prison. Summer changed to winter, and she didn't have warm clothes. But God led her to meet an orphan who had visited them in China. He was wearing several layers of clothing. He gave some of his clothes to her, which was a personal sacrifice because clothes were a currency for him to bribe the guards when he needed something urgently.

After 72 days, the North Korean government released her. Her condition had deteriorated so severely that her daughter didn't recognize her at first. After this incident, the Hans decided that only Han Chung would involve himself in North Korean work. That way, if something happened to him, at least she would be there for their children, and she wouldn't know the details of his work. Hence, she would be safe from interrogators.

He did not want them to go to an unknown materialistic place like South Korea, and this is perhaps why the Chinese authorities tolerated him.

As the years passed, North Korea made its border tighter. The government put those it found trying to escape into concentration camps. Chinese churches were hesitant to help fugitives because, in alignment with the North Korean government, the Chinese government would punish them. Pastor Han's church was the exception.

Word spread among North Koreans that if you needed help, you should see Pastor Han. He would first help the North Koreans he met with clothes and food, carefully trying to evaluate them. If he felt the person was not a spy, he would share Bible stories with them. If he sensed some hunger for God, he would preach the gospel to them. If they received Christ, he would make them join one of the many house churches near the border, where they would undergo several months of intensive training. Then, he would ask them to invite their relatives to China and make the believer share the gospel with them.

One of the North Korean women, a former smuggler whom Han and his wife had discipled, initially got interested in meeting him because another prisoner had told her about God, using the term Hananim, meaning "One God" instead of the more common word hanulnim (sky god). She eventually became one of his key workers.

Sang-chul was a North Korean. He spoke to a worker from Voice of the Martyrs: "In primary school, we were taught that all missionaries were terrorists. They told us that a missionary will be nice to you at first, but when they get you into their homes, then they will kill you and eat your liver. I set out for China because my family was at the point of starvation. As I was picking mushrooms in the forest, wondering how I would sell them in the Chinese market without knowing Chinese; a man met me and offered to sell them for me. I knew something was different when he didn't cheat me; he was helping me when it was dangerous for him. I became fearful when he told me that he did what he did because he was a Christian. Would he kill me? One day he told me that God is real. There is hope for everybody. I was shocked - "God", this is the word that can bring soldiers at night to our homes and take us to concentration camps."

After some time, Sang-chul asked Pastor Han for a Bible. His wife was terrified when she saw it, but eventually, both Sang-chul and his wife came to faith in Christ.

"Pastor Han unconditionally loved us and treated us well with love. I felt his heart. They helped us from a genuine heart even though they put themselves in danger. The more I met Pastor Han, I felt more his heart came from the Lord; without God he wouldn't help me. That is why I realized Christianity is a real religion."

Secret agents in North Korea have been planning to assassinate him for the past 10 years. In the middle of that dangerous situation, he was doing God's work for decades; that is special.

After one of his mentees, Deacon Jang, along with several others, was arrested, both Chinese and South Korean intelligence officers warned Pastor Han that he had become a target of the North Korean government.

"We were thinking of leaving the area several times," Mrs. Han said, "but God stopped us."

On April 30, 2016, Han Chung received a phone call at about 1:30 p.m. and left home. Mrs. Han didn't hear who was on the other line, and she didn't ask him. In the evening, she became concerned when he didn't call like he usually does, and so she contacted the police. By 7 p.m., the police found his body in his car. His assassins stabbed him in the heart and slashed an artery in his neck - standard North Korean practice. He also had seven deep wounds to his head, which showed the rage of his killers. His wife suspects that the phone caller was one of his contacts whom he thought was sincere but was not.

American coworker Eric Foley writes about him: "Frankly, most workers in North Korean ministry end up losing their souls in this work. Bitterness inevitably corrodes their insides after they are betrayed by North Koreans and other North Korean workers enough times. They come to hate the North Korean government and start praying for its collapse and for North Korean officials to die. After a while they stop praying at all....But Pastor Han did not fall into this trap because he started each day in morning prayer. He said that if he didn't pray, he couldn't do the work. God gave him a piercing sense of discernment, and people often commented about his sharp eyes. Those eyes kept him focused on Christ, and this kept him alive for a lot longer than anyone else could have survived in his situation."

In 2019, Han Chung's life account was retold in a short film, and Voice of the Martyrs, USA, added his story to a new international edition of the 450-year-old Foxe's Book of Martyrs. The film has been distributed to persecuted Christians in 70 countries. Voice of the Martyrs, Korea, estimates that Han was with at least 1,000 North Koreans before his death.

Secret agents in North Korea have been planning to assassinate him for the past 10 years. In the middle of that dangerous situation, he was doing God's work for decades; that is special.

HYMN STORY



In the 1890s, two British excavators were digging near the ruins of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (160 km southwest of Cairo). They found thousands of documents written on papyrus (an ancient form of paper made in Egypt), some personal and some official. Among them was an 11-inch by 2-inch fragment. It had details of grain shipments on one side. The fragment came to be known as the Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786. It was dated to the late third century. The contents were published in 1922.

On the other side of the fragment were the lyrics of a Christian song. The theme was praising God. The song asks the stars and the winds to be silent as the angels join God’s people in honoring the triune God, the Giver of all good things. Over the lyrics was Ancient Greek musical notation. Thus, historians of music could figure out the tune. The song with tune was six centuries older than any previously known hymn sung in churches. Although older lyrics were known (including some New Testament passages that seem to be songs), this was the oldest song for which the tune was known. The genre of the tune was an ancient Greek style of music that does not appeal to today’s global English-speaking audience very much. It is worth noting that the Christian community in Egypt likely originated with John Mark, who brought the gospel after the death of Peter.

Former songwriter and Wheaton College professor John Dickson longed to see modern Christians singing this song. He wrote a new translation of the lyrics, filling in some words that were missing from the fragment, and gave it to two singers: Chris Tomlin and Ben Fielding. They composed a tune and premiered the song on April 15, 2025, at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. John Dickson has made a documentary tracing the journey of this hymn.

“The First Hymn is a sacred gift passed down from the early Church—some of whom literally gave their lives for this song and for the gospel,” shared Tomlin. “Now, 1,800 years later, we stand in a long line of brave and bold believers, singing alongside them. This song reminds us of the history of our faith—it’s not a trend, it’s not a fad, and it’s certainly not 30 minutes old. It’s ancient, it’s historical, and it’s eternal. The worship of the one true God—the Giver of all good gifts—has echoed through generations.” Tomlin adds, “I am incredibly grateful and humbled to join my friend Ben Fielding and the Undeceptions Documentary Team in honoring those who came before us and helping bring this powerful hymn back to life—and back into the voice of the Church.”

*“Let all be silent:
The shining stars not sound forth,
All rushing rivers stilled,
As we sing our hymn To the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
As all Powers cry out in answer, ‘Amen, Amen.’
Might, praise, and glory forever to our God.
The only Giver of all good gifts. Amen. Amen.”*

“

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HOPE BEYOND HATRED

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAMS

22nd April, 2005 was a tragic day in the life of many families in our country. On that day, civilian tourists visiting the beautiful valley of Pahalgam were caught in a horrific terror attack. Twenty-six innocent lives were lost. Those who came seeking rest and refreshment returned with pain and trauma. Some lost loved ones forever. Eyewitnesses reported that the attackers demanded to know the religion of their victims before mercilessly pulling the trigger. These were not soldiers or combatants. They were ordinary people—mothers, fathers, children—slaughtered simply because of their religious identity.

How can such violence be justified? How can modern, “civilized” humanity still resort to such barbarity? Despite progress in education, science, and communication, our world continues to witness unimaginable cruelty. The sad truth is this: hatred has found a permanent home in the human heart. All sorts of explanations circulate in the media—political grievances, economic inequality, ideological extremism. But none of these fully explain the depth of evil we see. When we think we’ve seen the worst, something even more horrific unfolds.

Only the living Word of God gives a truthful diagnosis of the human condition:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

This is not just about terrorists or criminals. It is about all of us. Anger, jealousy, greed, pride, and prejudice reside within every human soul. And no political reform, educational system, or technological advancement can cleanse the heart. But there is hope. The Bible speaks of a God who does not merely condemn human evil—He offers to transform the human heart.

Consider the scene at the cross of Jesus Christ. Two criminals were crucified beside Him. One mocked Jesus. The other, aware of his guilt and Jesus’ innocence, cried out, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Jesus responded with astonishing grace:

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

This man had nothing to offer—no good deeds, no religious credentials. Yet Jesus received him, forgave him, and gave him eternal life. That is the beauty of the Gospel: no one is too far gone, no heart is too dark, no sin too deep.

Dear friend, if your heart is troubled by the brokenness and hatred in this world, know this: Jesus came into this world not to condemn, but to save. He died on the cross bearing the weight of human sin—your sin, my sin. He rose again to offer new life to anyone who turns to Him in repentance and faith. The Gospel is not just a message—it is the power of God to change lives. It is the only true hope beyond hatred. Today, you are invited; not to a religion, but to a relationship with the living God. Repent of your sins. Turn to Jesus. Receive His forgiveness. Enter into the life of God. Let the One who conquered sin and death transform your heart—and through you, bring healing to a hurting world.

Straight Paths is a bimonthly e-zine which exists to edify young believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in their Christian life, to help them apply Biblical principles in their daily lives, and to equip them to share their faith with others. It also exists to serve anyone else who may have an interest in the Bible.

STRAIGHT PATHS

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