

Article: Lift up your Heads, ye Mighty Gates!

In verse 1 of this well-known hymn (LH 18), we sing, “Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold, the King of Glory waits.”

Many of us have sung these words so often, and we have such fond memories of past Christmases connected with them, that we hardly pause to think of what the words mean—they are just part of a hymn that we love to sing.

The first line of this hymn comes from Psalm 24, verse 7: “*Lift up your heads, you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!*”

Bible scholars have different opinions about what these words mean. Some believe that the words “gates” and “doors” do not actually refer to real gates and doors; rather, they stand for something else.

Martin Luther wrote that this psalm “...calls on the “doors” of the world, that is, the kings and princes, to make way for the kingdom of Christ. They and those who for the most part rage against Him (Psalm 2) ask, ‘Who is this King of glory?’ as if they were to say, ‘This beggar!’ ...” [we shall not submit to him!]. If we accept Luther’s interpretation, we are singing out and declaring that unbelieving world leaders and rulers should get out of the way, because the King of Kings is coming!

Another interpretation of these words says, “*Here the gates and doors stand for the people who go in and out through them. Ancient Jerusalem is surrounded by a high wall in which are a number of gates. The psalmist, thinking of the people with their heads down, assumes that they are in distress and are downhearted. He therefore shouts to them that they should lift up their heads and be lifted up; for then the King of Glory will come in.*” If we accept this interpretation, we are telling one another that we should rejoice in our knowledge that the King of Kings is watching over us, and that we should never be downhearted or in distress.

Regardless of whose interpretation is accurate, we sing the hymn joyfully as a way of welcoming Jesus into our hearts as our King, Saviour, and Best Friend.