



*17 Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: 18 Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name, 19 Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: 20 Which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; 21 And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; 22 And hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; 23 And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them. (Jeremiah 32:17-23)*

It may be true that every man's heart burns with the love and beauty of his native soil, but America is, without any shadow of doubt, one of the most beautiful and majestic lands in the world. It is rich in soil, in minerals, in mountain grandeur and desert solitude. The land is divided, not by barriers, but rather by lush rivers and valleys. What a blessed gift God has placed in the hands of those who came here seeking to worship God in the manner of their own consciences and without government interference. What a great sacrifice those first pilgrims made, and what unknown dangers they confronted, in launching out on the high seas to America. They were not seeking a government subsidy, but a security FROM government.

The author, Katherine Lee Bates, first penned the poem (which became the lyrics to our hymn) and published it on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July of 1895. She was inspired to write it after a visit to Pike's Peak. The music, *Materna*, was composed by church organist and choirmaster Samuel A. Ward at Grace Episcopal Church in Newark, New Jersey in 1892. During my elementary school years beginning in 1950, *America the Beautiful* could be sung in its entirety by every public school student in America. It is amazing how rapidly our memories decline from those things meaningful and attach to those of trivial interests.

## America the Beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain;  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood,  
From sea to shining sea.

O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved,  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And every gain divine.

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam,  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self control,  
Thy liberty in law.

*O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain; For purple mountain majesties Above the fruited plain! America! America! God shed His grace on thee, And crown thy good with brotherhood, From sea to shining sea.* Just consider the beauty and security of the land to which God has made us heirs. We are a land of unwallled cities in which the people dwell at peace and in security. *And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.* Ezek 38:11 (KJV) We have been protected by the God of Grace and His Providence over these two centuries of our founding; but our memories are fleeting. We have forgotten the purpose of our founding as a nation. We have grown fat with pleasures and merchandise, and have forgotten the verse that follows that cited above: *12 To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.* (Ezek 38:12) The prophetic words of Abraham Lincoln seem more cogent now than ever before: *America need not fear the enemy from without. He will never be able to drink from the Ohio River unless we allow it. No, the greater danger will come from within when men forget the principles of justice and liberty upon which the nation was founded.* We have lived a happy and prosperous life in America, but we have, over the past few decades, forgotten the blood of patriots spilled for our liberties, and the God of our Nativity.

*O beautiful for heroes proved In liberating strife, Who more than self their country loved, And mercy more than life! America! America! May God thy gold refine, Till all success be nobleness, And every gain divine.* The strength of America has been a faith in God underlined with a love of the Liberty that only God can provide. The liberating strife to which Ms. Bates refers is that blood shed on battlefields everywhere

in defense of liberty and freedom. Such liberty does not derive from the beneficence of governments, but is a grant of God alone. When America forgets that principle – and they seem to be on the verge of forgetting – our freedom becomes subject to extinction. Political Correctness has inhibited one of the freedoms granted by God and supported in our founding documents, Freedom of Expression – not only by word, but also in worship. The blood of heroes has watered the landscape of America and insured our continued freedoms. It is truly the love of freedom that has made us a great nation. The embodiment of American virtue has been that love of freedom that considers no one truly free until every man, woman, and child is free. Christian faith has been the foundation of that virtue. The Christian religion is based on love and faith, not compulsion at the point of the sword wielded by some fanatical imam or potentate. God has refined our gold in the furnace of bloody contests and patriotic zeal. If we have progress at all in America, it must come as a result of that single virtue of Christian love.

*O beautiful for patriot dream That sees beyond the years Thine alabaster cities gleam, Undimmed by human tears! America! America! God mend thine every flaw, Confirm thy soul in self control, Thy liberty in law.* A drift into the abyss of socialism and totalitarianism will only accelerate the demise of a Godly nation. We already witness the ruinous effects of policies that attempt to adjudicate personal responsibility and impose an unmerited 'right' for all desires social and material. If we are to be a Godly people, we must bear a vision and foresight similar to that of our national emblem, the Bald Eagle, who makes his dwelling in the highest parts of the earth. He sees prey from miles above the earth. He labors daily for his bread, and eats only what he kills himself. But we, instead, have rather taken on the nature of the oyster that makes its dwelling in the filthy beds of the sea. He labors for nothing, yet he opens his shell and consumes whatever refuse falls within. That is the best description of socialism that my mind can contemplate. Godly people have far vision to see the consequences of their actions. We have lost that vision in America. Those alabaster cities of America have become contaminated with sin and drugs, and every vile sexual sin. Our youth are subjected to odorous influences but our elders and politicians seem to care little so long as the political payoffs are made on time. Do not misunderstand: I do not believe America is a lost cause, but I do believe that it is high time for us to awaken from our drunken stupor and get a hold on our wayward behavior; allow God (not government) to mend our wounds and failures; place equal application of Godly law at the zenith of political power; and resort to self-control, rather than onerous legislation to dictate our ways and manners. Then perhaps we will return to the beautiful land our Forefathers established on this continent.