



# The Good News

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## *It Is Well With My Soul*

By Jerry Fite

She placed her son's dead body in the room that she and her husband had provided for Elijah, the holy man of God. Seeing the determined Shunamite woman now approaching Mt. Carmel, the prophet of God directs his servant to greet her. Ask her, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" Though death had taken away the Shunamite's beloved son, her faith in God and His prophet prompts her reply, "It is well" (2 Kings 4:26).

Centuries later, H.G. Spafford would look to these words to respond to a great tragedy in his life. The prominent lawyer from Chicago suffered great financial loss in the Chicago fire of 1871. However, losing his real estate investments could not compare to the loss he would have to endure two years later. He placed his wife, and four young daughters on the French steamship S.S. Ville du Havre headed for Europe. Due to business demands, he planned to join them later. But seeing his daughters off on this transatlantic voyage would be the last time he would see them.

On November 22, 1873, an English sailing vessel would collide with the ship transporting Spafford's family. In less than thirty minutes, their steamship would sink in the depths of the Atlantic. Anna Spafford had time to gather her children on deck to ask God to save them from the sea, or if that is not His will, that He would grant them strength to die. Anna would be found by rescuers face down but buoyed upon floating debris. Sadly, her two-year-old Tanetta was snatched from her arms by the forceful waves. The youngest child joined her older sisters Annie (11 years old), Maggie (9 years old), and Bessie (5 years old) in death, buried in the depths of the Atlantic with 222 others. From Wales, Anna would telegraph her husband with the words, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

H.G. Spafford would soon join his wife in England. Passing over the Atlantic, it was pointed out to him that the Atlantic was three miles deep at the point where the ships collided. On a piece of Chicago's Brevoort House stationary, H.G. Spafford penned the words that we now know as the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul." He saw his young daughters as dear lambs now folded together in safety.

Trusting in a Sovereign God, he wrote, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows role, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Billows have gone over the psalmist when he writes, "Yet Jehovah will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; and in the night His song shall be with me" (Psalms 42:6). No doubt faith's "song in the night" was on H.G. Spafford's mind for at the end of his original fourth verse, he wrote, "...and the Lord shall descend, A song in the night, oh my soul".

Like Job, Mr. Spafford viewed life under the control of God. He gives, and He takes away; Regardless, "blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:21). Such faith allows one to trust in God in times of grief, instead of charging God "foolishly" (cf. Job 1:22). Though God "would slay me", Mr. Spafford seems to respond with Job, "...nevertheless I will maintain my ways before Him" (Job 13:15).

P.P. Bliss, who set H.G. Spafford's words to music, would suffer his own tragedy. His life was cut short at the Ashtabula River Railroad disaster on December 29, 1876. When the rail car he was on descended with a collapsing bridge, he died trying to save his wife from the flames. Again, Is it well?