

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

Sing Unto the Lord a New Song

Reflections on the Evolution of Music in the Armenian Evangelical Church

This article was printed in AMAA News, June 2021.

By Rev. Nerses and Sevan Balabanian

"I love the sound of the pipe organ."

"I worship at that church because their praise band is awesome."

"Why do they sing such outdated and irrelevant songs?"

"I miss singing the traditional hymns."

"These are foreign songs. Where are the Sharagans (liturgical songs from the Armenian Apostolic Mass)?"

Have you heard such comments? Do any of these statements represent your own opinion about music in your church? Having been involved in the music of the Armenian Evangelical Church in different countries for several decades, we have experienced and participated in a variety of genres in church music.

Here are some reflections regarding how music evolved within the Armenian Evangelical Church.

Historical Background

Since its founding 175 years ago on July 1, 1846, the Armenian Evangelical Church has considered congregational singing to be an essential part of the worship service. Worshippers raise their voices together as a community of believers. Together they sing praises to God, together they recount what God has done, together they proclaim their faith, together they acknowledge their needs, and together they renew their commitment.

Several years before they founded of the Armenian Evangelical Church, the members of the *Parebashdoutian Miyapanoutune* (The Society of the Pious), were known to



sing translated hymns at their gatherings.¹

It is important to note that among its first members were several priests who sang *Sharagans* and wrote new songs in the same style. For example, the Rev. Apisoghom Utujian, the first ordained pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church, wrote a new song called "*Bandzastsi Aysor*" in

the style of a *Sharagan*. It's too bad that even though the lyrics remain, the tune has not been preserved.²

The necessity of making songs more understandable to the common parishioner gave rise to a movement of translation. Along with the translation of the *Krapar* (Classical Armenian) Bible to *Ashkharapar* (Vernacular Armenian), the missionaries translated a vast number of Western hymns to Armenian.* The missionaries were not totally against the *Sharagans*. In fact, they expressed their admiration of their beauty which they said was based on the principles of nature and the rules that govern it. However, the lyrics of the *Sharagans* were in *Krapar* and therefore not easy for the common people to understand. Moreover, in the 19th Century, the tunes of *Sharagans* were sometimes distorted and sung differently in each church due to the absence of modern musical notation.³

The first two Armenian Evangelical hymnals were published in 1856 and 1860.** In 1901, a spiritual revival swept through Aintab, Marash, Kilis, Kharpert and numerous other towns and villages in Asia Minor. The awakening was so intense that it was described as "a fire that can't be extinguished even with the waters of the Arctic Ocean."⁴ The believers would sing and recite Bible verses for hours.

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Sing Unto the Lord

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In the second half of the 19th century, many more hymnals were published, some of them up to 50,000 copies and 10 editions.⁵

Armenian Evangelicals, in cooperation with the missionaries, made a substantial contribution to the development of musical knowledge among the 19th Century Armenians in Turkey.⁶ In addition to the publication of the hymnals, reading music was taught in the boarding schools and the seminaries. Talented students received training to play hymns. Many students received choral training to sing in three or four voices. The missionaries made sure that each church, whether big or small, had a bell and an organ (probably harmonium).⁷

Music in the Armenian Evangelical Church

For the last 175 years, hymns have remained the basic genre sung in the Armenian Evangelical churches around the world. The piano, the organ, and the choir have become almost the standard in every worship service. Also, several *Sharagans*, which are consistent with the theology of the Armenian Evangelical Church, have been incorporated in the hymnals and have been much appreciated by the congregations. It is noteworthy that several Armenian Evangelical musicians such as Rev. Sisag Emurian and Rev. Armenag Missirian (Armis) wrote original four-part hymns with an Armenian flavor.

A radical shift occurred in the style of church music worldwide in the second half of the 20th Century and slightly later in the Armenian Evangelical Church. It is hard to define when exactly contemporary Christian music was born, but it is pretty safe to say that the late 1960s and early 1970s gave rise to a movement of modern ways of singing in church. The guitar took over the prominent place of the organ or the piano.

Almost at the same time in the early 1970s, a similar thing happened among many Armenian Evangelical youth groups around the world. Along with spiritual revivals, these new songs came to bring a lot of excitement to the Armenian Evangelical youth all over the diaspora. The Christian Endeavor or other church youth groups embraced the songs and used them extensively in their summer camps and in church. In the US, Canada and France, these new songs were sung in the local languages, but in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran they were being translated into Armenian.

During those years, a revival happened within the Armenian speaking communities to embrace new Armenian Christian contemporary songs. A significant and unique contribution was made by Rev. Hagop Djambazian of Beirut. The melodies of the songs he composed were close to the

hearts of the Armenian people. As he performed them in several countries along with his brother Rev. Berdj and broadcasted them on the radio, this new genre was much appreciated. Moreover, behind closed doors in Soviet Armenia, talented young believers started composing new praise songs. Similarly, believers in Iran, Syria, the US and elsewhere contributed with their own compositions.

As all of these new songs, whether Armenian or foreign, came into the church, youth bands were formed. The guitars, drums, keyboards, amplifiers, and speakers entered the sanctuary.

Even though this change brought a new excitement in the church, yet for some people this shift was not acceptable, and triggered a lot of resistance.

Sing a New Song

The psalmist writes, ***“Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.”*** (Psalm 96:1)

What is “a new song”? How and when can we incorporate them in our worship?

It would be wrong to suggest that we should never try anything new in worship. Music styles change, and so do instruments. If we look at church history, we come across many periods when those changes created resistance. Can you imagine that polyphonic singing (singing in harmony) was considered offensive and devilish? Counter melodies and harmonies caused an outrage, pipe organs were removed and destroyed, and hymns that were not direct quotations from the Bible were banned.

Traditional vs Contemporary

We often come across worship services labeled as “Traditional,” “Contemporary” or even “Blended.” For a moment, let us put aside all bias and objectively evaluate the styles of church music.⁸ What are the characteristics of Traditional Hymns, Contemporary Christian Music and Armenian Contemporary Praise songs?

A. Hymns: The melody of a hymn drives the music. The tune has contours, high points and pauses between phrases when the congregation breathes together. Hymns mostly cover a range of one octave making congregational singing possible. They are written in four-part harmony expressed in consecutive vertical chord progressions. They were mainly composed in the 20th Century or earlier. Most hymn lyrics are doctrinally rich poems, uncompromising and Christ-centered. However, some of them sound irrelevant to the ears of the contemporary audience and don’t appeal to those who were not raised in church.

B. Contemporary Christian songs: The beat, the rhythm and the chord progression drive the music and carry it forward. The rhythm often creates an urge to move your body or tap along. The melody may span a very small range (a few notes) or jump an octave thus covering a huge range. Contemporary song lyrics

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are often personal and experience-based, written in simple, everyday language. They appeal to the young people and those who are not familiar with church jargon. These songs are led by a band and soloists. Although the intention is to lead congregational singing, yet a tendency of becoming a performance is present.

C. Armenian Contemporary Praise songs (original, untranslated): The modern rhythm and the Armenian melodies drive the music. Minor key tunes sound familiar to the Armenian people's ears and are learned instantly. Lyrics are in either Western or Eastern Armenian, depending on where they were composed, and they cover a variety of themes. Even though this style of music was welcomed within the Armenian Evangelical youth and church services, new compositions did not thrive as expected. Unfortunately, in the recent years we have witnessed the booming of translated praise songs from English to Armenian.

Reflections and Suggestions

"Worship God. If necessary, use music."⁹ We need to be careful not to make music a primary issue in our worship service. Instead of uniting the congregation, sometimes music becomes an obstacle and causes divisions within the body of the church.

What is the "best" or "most appropriate" type of music in the Armenian Evangelical Church today? There is no easy answer to that question. Jesus said, **"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and**

his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24 NIV11). When we worship, we must humble ourselves before God, surrender our lives to His control, and adore Him for who He is. Worship is a lifestyle, not just a Sunday activity. It is an attitude of the heart. When people come together to worship, what really matters is to do it in Spirit and in truth. Other things are secondary.

Here are some final remarks and suggestions that might be useful to edify the body of Christ as we come together to worship.

To the pastors and church musicians:

- Select a variety of genres including traditional, contemporary, Armenian and keep a healthy balance.
- Present hymns and contemporary songs with similar excitement. Choosing the appropriate tempo will help the congregation to sing enthusiastically and not drag.
- Choose songs with lyrics that are consistent with the theology of Armenian Evangelical Church.
- Make sure the songs involve congregational participation and do not become a performance.
- Find talented people who can contribute to composing new Armenian Christian songs of any genre.
- Carefully notate any new song so that it will remain unaltered from one generation to the next.
- Even if you use projected lyrics for congregational singing, provide also the written score for singing correctly, and if possible, harmonizing.

To the congregation:

- Treasure the traditional hymns and value their depth.
- Familiar songs are always desirable. Be open to learn new ones, and they soon will become familiar and perhaps even beloved.
- Be open to other styles of music even if they are not your most favorite.
- Embrace the youth, show acceptance.

To God be the glory. *Soli Deo gloria.*

¹ Yervant H. Kassouny, Hye Avedaranagan Yegeghestineroo Bashdamoonki Yerkeroo yev Yerkaranneroo Masin (About the Worship Songs and Hymnals of the Armenian Evangelical Churches), Beirut, 2013, p. 23

² Yervant H. Kassouny, p. 25

³ Yervant H. Kassouny, p. 26

⁴ Rev. Yeghia Kassouny, Loosashavigh- Badmootune Hye Avedaranagan Sharzhman (The Path of Light: History of the Armenian Evangelical Movement), Beirut, American Press, 1947, p. 245

⁵ Yervant H. Kassouny, p. 32

⁶ Rev. Vahan H. Tootikian, The Benefits and Contributions of the Armenian Evangelical Church to the Armenian Nation, (Armenian Evangelical World Council and Armenian Heritage Committee, 2001) p. 30

⁷ Rev. Yeghia Kassouny, p. 362

⁸ David Wesley, Traditional Hymns vs Contemporary Worship <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqFVFYOMgFM>

⁹ Daniel I. Block, Worship God at All Times, If Necessary, Use Music. Christianity Today, May, 2019

* "The translation of hymns lasted over several decades. Even though there were tens of translators, the names of missionaries Rev. Elias Riggs and Rev. Charles Tracy in addition to Rev. Eflaton Elmajian stand out as having translated the largest number of hymns.

**As early as the 19th Century, there were songbooks for the youth as well. Yerker yev Yeghanagner Dghayots Hamar (Songs and Tunes for the Children) Constantinople, 1860, Yerkeran- Gronagan yev Azkayin (Songbook- Religious and Patriotic), Cairo, 1914, Badanyats Yerker (Songs for the Youth) Beirut, 1939, Hokevor Yerker Nor Serounti Hamar (Spiritual Songs for the New Generation) Beirut, 1973, Nor Yerkerketsek Deroch (Sing a New Song Unto the Lord), Beirut, 1999

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING

Michael Rettig & Rocio Hernandez Solis

June 5, 2021

Parents: John & Cindy Rettig; Rodolfo & Ana Maria Solis Hernandez

WITH SYMPATHY: WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED BY THE PASSING OF:

Susan Agazarian

June 7, 2021

Husband: Gary Agazarian

Sons: Jim and Alan Agazarian

Jackie Manselian

June 17, 2021

Husband: Robert Manselian

Son: Ara Kahrmanian; Daughter-in-Law: Jill; Grandchildren: Grace, Lily and Ben

Carole Sarkisian Bonard

June 23, 2021

Edward Sarkisian's sister

Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little;

I will set you over much.

Enter into the joy of your master.

(Matthew 25:21)

A message from

Mrs. Agnes Kaprielian

A celebration of Leonard Kaprielian's life will be held Saturday, August 21, from 1-5pm, Spinnaker Restaurant Banquet Room, 100 Spinnaker Drive, Sausalito, CA. Family and friends are invited to attend and remember a truly remarkable person.

Volunteers Needed

The Light-House Recovery program is in need of committed volunteers to serve one 4-hour slot each week. This is an opportunity to mix and mingle while supporting the necessary work of the ministry and the women and children we serve.

Volunteers receive a 20% discount off all purchases. Please help us to fill this need by spreading the word.

To volunteer or for more information, please call Vicki Luna, (559) 222-4924.

2021 ANNUAL GIVING RECAP

Bring the full tith into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:10 ESV)

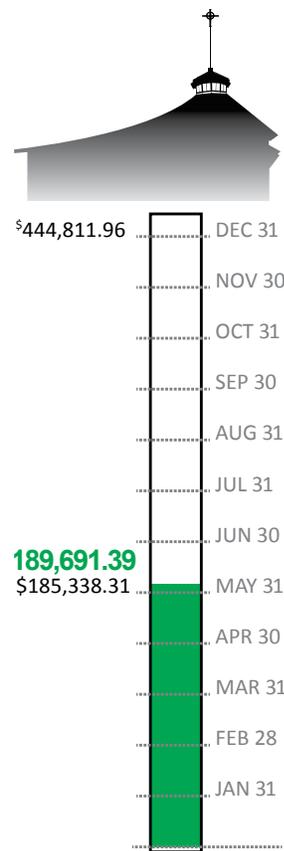
I wish I could use emojis in my report! Never in the time I have served as treasurer can I say during the year that contributions are at 102%. As a number person it's a gift from God. As a member of this church it is a blessing from God. And as a follower of Jesus it is assurance of His presence in our lives. The graph indicates budget and actual activity for 2021 to date. It indicates the total budgeted amount for annual contributions. Also shown is the budgeted amount up to the current month. The final amount shown is the actual contributions we have collected through the current month. Thank you and more importantly, Praise God! May we all be obedient to Him with the treasures He has abundantly filled our storehouse with.

We are having our annual changing of the guard, so to speak, at Pilgrim right now. New board members, new officers, new leaders. There is a comfort in knowing that the change is not one to fear or be anxious about. It is one brother or sister stepping in as the other brother or sister has a rest or serves in another area.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12 ESV)

But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Corinthians 12:18-20 NIV)

We have been blessed with a plethora of those who God placed and they responded to serve to make up our body. During the past 15 months our church home has required program organization, repairs, updates and anticipation of replacements in the near future. Those are regular occurrences for our church home. What was not regular was a pandemic. Many of our leaders went over and above to make sure everything was status quo while making important decisions based on the multitude of incoming confusion of what to do. Their heart was focused on the goodwill of the church and serving God in a responsible manner. As treasurer it is always a delight to give a good financial report. As a church member I want to acknowledge those that I have seen give not just 102% but more like 201% to make sure our church life was seamless. I want to thank our Badvelis, the Deacons and Board of Trustees along with Edward Saliba, Pete Moosoolian, David Melikian and Sue Moosoolian who will be missed. Thank you for seeing us through this trial with grace. ***...Well done, good and faithful servant. (Matthew 25:21a)***



– Treasurer Patrice Ruble

MODERATOR'S REPORT

“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”

(Ephesians 4:4-7 NIV)

As I begin my term as Moderator, I need to confess that I've already missed my first Church Council meeting. I was in Idaho helping a friend of 50+ years deal with a serious health issue.

My friend's troubles started with one area of his body failing to function properly. When doctors tried to repair that problem, the repair caused different areas to fail. I am helping him find a combination of doctors that can heal his whole body, not just one area.

My friend's medical condition demonstrates what God's Word tells us about the body of Christ and spiritual gifts. Our bodies need all of our organs to function properly. The excerpt from Ephesians, above, reminds us that we, as the body of Christ, need each other because each of us has a unique – and uniquely important – role to play. Best of all, Christ has given each believer the gifts necessary to fulfill our functions.

I am grateful for all of you, and your willingness to play your part in Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church, and in the Church Universal. Let us enter this new church year ready to build on the good foundation laid by those who served before us, and strive to fulfill God's will on earth, to His glory.

I would also ask that we continue praying for Armenia, and our sister church in Gyumri. I also ask for prayer for those who have lost loved ones. May God grant them comfort and assurance that Jesus Christ conquered death.

Finally, our Texas missionaries should be home by the time you receive this. As of the time I am writing this, they are safely in Arizona, looking forward to their return. May God grant them a safe return, and may their good work in Texas bear heavenly fruit. Our God has, indeed, demonstrated his eternal, faithful, love to us.

– By Moderator John Eleazarian



CELEBRATION OF THE 175th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

On July 1, 2021, the Armenian Evangelical Churches around the world will celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Armenian Evangelical Church. On July 1, 1846, thirty-seven men and three women established the first Armenian Evangelical Church in Pera, Istanbul (then Constantinople).

The establishment of the Armenian Evangelical Church developed into a movement which expanded into education and missions – its causation profoundly impacting the Ottoman Empire. As pastors, missionaries and laymen continued to spread God's Word, just over a decade later the Armenian Evangelical Church had over forty Sunday schools with 9,000 pupils. That number rose to 22,700 following World War 1 (Tootikian). So many of these committed their lives to Christ.

By 1915, the Armenian Evangelical Church established three seminaries, 369 elementary schools, 54 secondary schools, colleges, and technical and vocational schools throughout Anatolia and Asia Minor. Two schools for the deaf and the blind were also initiated. In addition, the education of girls was another aspect of the progressive nature of the Evangelical movement among Armenians. Beside education in general, the Armenian Evangelical Church had an impact on the Armenian language, especially with the translation of the Bible into modern Armenian.

Today, there are approximately 100 Armenian Evangelical churches in the following countries: Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Egypt, England, France, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Uruguay, and the United States of America.

Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church is one of thirty-three Armenian Evangelical Churches that comprise the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America (AEUNA). There are seven (6) Armenian Evangelical Unions around the globe: Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Europe (AEFE); Armenian Evangelical Union of France (AEUF); Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE); Union of Evangelical Church of Armenia (UECA); Armenian Evangelical Union of Eurasia (AEUE); and the AEUNA.

Our forefathers stood boldly for Jesus, not compromising their faith even in the face of genocide. It was the hope of these vibrant believers that the upcoming generations of Armenian Evangelical would be proud of their Armenian heritage, build on and learn from

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175th Anniversary

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the past, and continue to build Christ's Church and boldly preach the Gospel to bring unbelievers to salvation in Jesus Christ.

As Searan Salibian Kiledjian stated so beautifully in the History of the Armenian Evangelical Churches of North and South America, "As Armenian Evangelicals, we come from a rich history, and we need to remember the honor and privilege God has shown us by allowing us to know Him. Just like our forefathers had strong convictions and boldly shared the Gospel, let us look to them as an example to do the same".

– Roseann Emerzian Saliba

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-25)

Visit by the Armenian Consul General

On May 29, Pilgrim leadership met the Armenian Consul General Armen Baibourtian during his visit to the Valley. Mr. Baibourtian was given a tour of our church grounds that included a discussion about the immigration of Armenians to the Fresno area, the history of Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church, and Pilgrim's mission of serving the Armenian community, our neighbors, and the greater Fresno area. It was an honor to have Mr. Baibourtian visit, and we pray for him and his family and the work he does on behalf of Armenia.



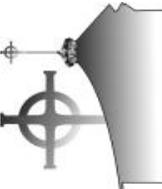
Pictured above: Back row: Richard Matoian, Paul Haroutunian, John Tufenkjian, First Armenian Presbyterian Church Reverend Greg Haroutunian, Stephen Goodale. Front row: Cristel Tufenkjian, Armenian Consul General Armen Baibourtian, Badveli Nerses Balabanian and Sevan Balabanian.

Dorcas Guild Lunch after one year of COVID – June 4



Installation of 2021-22 Officers and Committees – June 20



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 175th Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church	2	3
4 INDEPENDENCE DAY 10:30am Worship/ Communion/ Baptism: Shane Moosolian Celebration for the 175th Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church	5 OFFICE/ GFLC Are Closed	6 10:00am Women's Bible Study, Overflow Room	7	8 10:30am Carole Sarkisian Bonard's Funeral Service, Sanctuary	9 7:00am TGIF, Fireside Room	10 10:30am Jackie Manselian's Memorial Service, Sanctuary 11:30am Memorial Luncheon, Social Hall
11 10:30am Worship	12	13 10:00am Women's Bible Study, Overflow Room	14	15	16 7:00am TGIF, Fireside Room	17 9:30-12:30pm Graduation Party Overflow/Courtyard/Kitchen Badveli Nerses in LA
18 10:30am Worship Badveli Nerses in LA	19	20 10:00am Women's Bible Study, Overflow Room	21 Badveli Kevin on Vacation	22	23 7:00am TGIF, Fireside Room	24 Care Fresno Day Care, GFLC 11:30am Allen's Wedding Sanctuary
25 10:30am Worship	26	27 10:00am Women's Bible Study, Overflow Room	28 Badveli Kevin on Vacation	29 7:00-4:00pm FUSD, Climate/Culture, Social Hall	30 7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 7:00-4:00pm FUSD, Climate/Culture, Social Hall	31 2:00-4:00pm Piano Recital, Sanctuary



PILGRIM
Armenian
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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**Ages: Nursery 1 to 2 year old
3 years to 6th Grade**

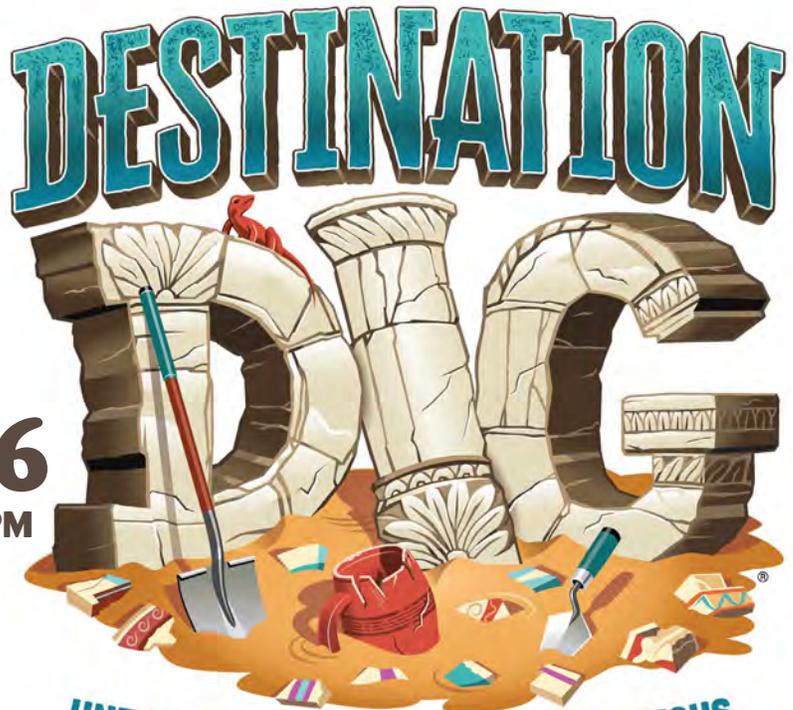
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UNEARTHING THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS
JEREMIAH 29:13