

# Biblical Allusions in the Poems of Sarah Piatt

by Larry Michaels

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## Introduction

The rich texture of Sarah Piatt's poetry is derived from the many layers of context she can draw upon, including history, current events, classical literature, and the Bible. Her poems reflect an extensive biblical knowledge. She graduated from Henry Female Seminary, a religious-based college in New Castle, Kentucky. Biblical references appear in many of her first poems in periodicals, written while still in school, her other early work of the 1850s, and continue to be found in all the books of her mature poetry.

Piatt experienced many trials and tragedies in her life. The Civil War was always close to home. Her family had owned slaves, and her early life straddled the Mason-Dixon Line across the Ohio River, followed by her years in Washington during the war. She knew the grief of losing children, the stresses of a complex marriage, and the feelings of isolation while living in a foreign country for over a decade, all of which can be seen in the many volumes of poetry she published from 1864 to 1894. Allusions to the Bible remained a consistent aspect of her writing, generally appearing more often in her most emotional poems.

Many of Piatt's references are not only to well-known texts, but also to more subtle passages, which she creatively applies to her own unique circumstances. Her allusions draw from many different books of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, including some of the minor books not often referenced. Piatt's deep knowledge of the Bible, as evident in this guide, is certainly an important component of her poetry.

## Scope and Content

These entries are taken from a careful reading of all the original poems published in her books and periodicals, including early works in *The Capital*, *The New York Ledger*, and *Louisville Journal*. The poems appear here in alphabetical order for easy reference, followed by the date of publication. Each entry includes the line or lines of the poem with an excerpt of the allusion and the corresponding chapters and verses of the Bible that are referenced. In many cases, the allusions can be found in more than one passage.

A couple longer poems, "A Wall Between" and "A Year—MDCCCLX," contain dozens of references that would require a longer essay for full explication. Other allusions could doubtlessly be discovered, but those included here are intended to reveal the importance of the Bible throughout Piatt's work.

# Guide to Piatt's Biblical Allusions

**“After Her First Party.”** (1889)

Lines 20-21: Thinking of Adam...once in Eden. Genesis: chapters 2 & 3, and others.

**“Ah, Chasms and Cliffs of Snow!”** (1880)

Line 16: After death...one thirst for water. Luke 16:24.

**“The Altar at Athens.”** (1877)

Line 9: The Altar Paul at Athens saw. Acts 17:16-34. Theme of poem.

Line 14: Nineveh. Jonah 3:2-7, Luke 11:29-32.

Line 28: What Hand shall write thereon. Exodus 31:18.

**“Answering a Child.”** (1876)

Lines 16-18: He cannot undo...the fire of His will. I Peter 1:6-7.

**“Asking for Tears.”** (1877)

Line 12: Therefore, give me tears. Matthew 5:4.

**“At the Grave of a Suicide.”** (1886)

Line 1: You sat in judgment on him. Matthew 7:1, Luke 6:37.

Line 3: The Bitter Cup. Matthew 26:39, 42.

**“At the Play.”** (1874)

Line 15: Christ clings to his cross, alone. John 19:17, Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 11:29.

**“The Avenger’s Warning.”** (1859)

Line 57. Forgive as thou hopest to be forgiven. Matthew 6:12,14-15.

**“The Baby’s Brother.”** (1880)

Lines 13-14: If Baby is sweet...he’ll not last. Genesis: chapters 2 & 3.

**“The Black Princess.”** (1872)

Line 33: Knight of the Pale Horse. Revelations 6:8.

Line 41: Her Father’s House. Luke 2:49, John 2:16 & 14:2.

**“A Bride to Her School-Mate.”** (1859)

Line 39. He is haughty as Lucifer! I Timothy 3:6.

**“The Brother’s Hand.”** (1871)

Lines 103-105: A child-Cain...where they had played. Genesis: chapter 4.

**“A Call on Sir Walter Raleigh.”** 1883)

Lines 43-44: Yet he sailed but yesterday, with Edmund Spenser. Psalm 90:4.

**“Calling the Dead.”** (1875)

Line 9: Poor baby faith—so foolish or so wise. Luke 18:16-17.

Line 15: Seeking for a sign. Luke 11:29.

Line 16: Like this child of mine. Luke 9:47-48.

**“Child’s-Faith.”** (1877)

Theme of the poem. Luke 18:16-17 and others. See “Calling the Dead.”

**“The Christening.”** (1884)

Line 11: The Uninvited Guest. Matthew 22:11-13.

**“Claude Percy.”** (1857)

Lines 54-56. Percy’s blood forgiven?...Unavenged, it cries to heaven. Gen. 4:10, Ps. 9:12.

**“The Clothes of a Ghost.”** (1874)

Line 37: They were only fashioned for moth and rust. Matthew 6:19-20.

Lines 41-42: Like the lilies arrayed—that toil not nor spin. Matthew 6:28-29.

**“A Coat-of-Arms.”** (1877)

Lines 89-92: Your ancient Tree...Forbidden Fruit. Genesis: chapter 3.

**“Comfort—By a Coffin.”** (1876)

Lines 28-30: Thorns must grow...to crown Christ on a cross. John 19:1-5.

**“Counsel [In the South].”** (1880)

Lines 17, 23-24: Christ must be betrayed...with a kiss. Matthew 26:48, Luke 22:47-48.

**“Death before Death.”** (1871)

Line 8: And music of mock-harps. Amos 5:23 & 6:5.

**“Denied.” I.** (1880)

Lines 11-12: He who had not where to lay his head. Luke 9:58.

Line 13-14: My Lord Christ...my guest-room. Matthew 25:40,45.

**“A Doubt.”** (1874)

Line 30: The cross of my Lord, it has known. Matthew 16:24, Luke 14:27.

**“Dreamings.”** (1858)

Line 14. The nearer glory of each burning star? I Cor. 15:41.

**“An Eagle’s Plume from Palestine.”** (1871)

Lines 15-16: The Father’s blessing...likeness of a dove. Matthew 3:16, John 1:32.

**“Earth in Heaven.”** (1871)

Line 6: To go up and be glorified. John 12: 23 & 13:31.

Line 30: Angels in heaven. Matthew 18:10, Mark 12:25 & 13:32.

- “An Emigrant Singing from a Ship.”** (1886)?  
Lines 24-25: Have a care lest Aerial join your song. Name for Jerusalem. Isaiah 29.
- “Ernest and Eustace.”** (1857)  
Line 28. Cursed his gods—and died! Job 2:9.
- “The Fairy’s Gift.”** (1888)  
Line 35: Did honey-dews drop in that wilderness? Psalm 78:24, John 6:31,49.
- “Fancies.”** (1860)  
Line 17. To the gates of gold and pearl she led thee. Rev. 21:21.
- “The Flowers in the Ground.”** (1860)  
Lines 13-14. Angel of Morning...away from the graves. Matthew 28:1-7, Luke 24:22.
- “Forgiveness.”** (1880)  
Lines 1-2: Show the bee that stung your hand the sweetest flower. Matthew 5:11-12, etc.
- “Fred’s Mother.”** (1888)  
Line 5: She only knows the Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12.
- “From an Ancient Mound.”** (1893)  
Line 7: Like some morning star. 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 2:28 & 22:16.
- “Fulfillment.”** (1876)  
Line 11: As God from dust has never made. Genesis 2:7, and many others.
- “Gaslight and Starlight.”** (1864)  
Line: 20. Triumph when highest is often low. Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11 & 18:14.
- “A Ghost at the Opera.”** (1873)  
Line 18: Outside of Eden’s shine. Genesis: chapters 2 & 3.
- “The Gift of Empty Hands.”** (1876)  
Line 28: True treasure is not lightly won. Matthew 13:44-45 & 19:21, Luke 12:32-34.
- “Giving Back the Flower.”** (1867)  
Line 10: That wild star... Revelation 8:10 & 9:1.
- “The Happier Gift.”** (1880)  
Line 7: Breathing the breath of life. Genesis 2:7.
- “The Happiest Man.”** (1880)  
Many lines: The Cup of sorrow and suffering. Matthew 26:39, John 18:11.

**“Happiness (A Butterfly).”** (1897)

Line 13: Some lily in God’s Garden lit. Matthew 6:28, Luke 12:27.

**“The Haunted Lover.”** (1858)

Line 57. On Sinai’s steep. Exodus 19.

**“Hearing the Battle—July 21, 1861.”** (1864)

Line 2: Sabbath. Exodus: chapters 16, 20, and 31, and other passages.

**“Her Blindness in Grief.”** (1873)

Lines 5-6: Treasure hid...from moth and rust. Matthew 6:19-20.

Line 12: A vision—that the seraphs see. Isaiah 6:1-8.

Lines 13-14: Woman, why weepest Thou...to His own mother. John 20:11-15.

**“Her Cross and Mine.”** (1877)

Lines 1-2: This is my cross...I have to bear. Matthew 16:24-26, Luke 9:23-25.

Line 20: To lose the world. Passages above and John 12: 24-25.

**“The Highest Mountain.”** (1871)

Lines 9-12: My Faith...as a grain of mustard seed... Matthew 17:20-21.

**“A Hint from Homer.”** (1878)

Line 1: Let the sun stand still. Joshua 10:12-13.

**“His Mother’s Way.”** (1880)

Theme of the poems. Matthew 25:31-46.

Lines 34-35: There may be stains...upon your own white hands. Matthew 7:3-5.

**“Home Again.”** (1876)

Theme of the poem. John 14:23, II Corinthians 5:8.

**“The House Below the Hill.”** (1880)

Line 43: Rachel’s cry. Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:18.

Line 49: Wounded Christ with thorn. Matthew 27:29, John 19:1-5.

**“A Hundred Years Ago.”** (1870)

Line 3: Bright sands nursed bright serpents. Numbers 21:4-6, Micah 7:17.

Line 18: Christ’s love in the sky. Many passages.

Line 22: Back to God’s hand the unresisting seas. Job 38:8-11.

**“I Want It Yesterday.”** (1874)

Line 17: Hand divine. Luke 1:66, and others.

**“I Wish that I could Go.”** (1874)

Lines 56: Strange City, shine. Revelations: chapters 21 & 22.

**“Ida’s Song of Parting.”** (1858)

Line 30. See God’s Heaven itself look merciless! Haggai 1:10.

**“If I Were a Queen.”** (1874)

Line 28: Till Judgment Day. Matthew 11: 20-24, and others.

Lines 57-58. In all his glory...arrays the lilies. Matthew 6:28, Luke 12:27.

**“In Street and Garden – I.”** (1885)

Line 6: Satan, stayed down there. I Chronicles 21:1, Mark 1:13, many others.

Line 7: Such a fire to burn things. Matthew 18:9 and others.

Similar theme of faith can be found in “Calling the Dead” and “Child’s-Faith.”

**“It Is Not Yesterday.”** (1888)

Theme of the poem. Psalm 90. (See “Stop the Clock.”)

**“The Lamb in the Sky.”** (1877)

Lines 7-8: Have I not read...a Lamb in the sky. John 1:29 & 36, Revelation: many more.

**“Leaving Love.”** (1874)

Line 28: The vast and utter loneliness of God. Lamentations 1:1 & 2:13.

**“Lion or Lamb?”** (1871)

Line 16: The Lamb of the two is the strong! John 1:29,36, Revelation 17:14.

**“Little Christian’s Trouble.”** (1880)

Theme of poem: Turn the other cheek. Matthew 5:39, Luke 6:29.

**“The Little Stockings.”** (1888)

Line 23: See in its branches the snow-white Dove. Matthew 3:16, John 1:32.

**“Marble or Dust?”** (1871)

Line 6: The dust of which I had been dimly made. Genesis 2:7, and others.

Line 24: Christ’s slow coming. II Peter 3:8-10.

**“A Mirage.”** (1857)

Line 31. The valley of shadows. Psalm 23:4.

**“More about the Fairies.”** (1877)

Line 6: You smallest of saints...Paul. Acts 13:9. The name Paul means “small.”

Lines 9-10: When he made Eve...the lilies of Eden. Genesis 2:21-23 & 3:20.

Lines 11-12: But the Snake? Genesis 3:13-15.

Lines 13-16: After the flood...saved in the ark. Genesis: chapters 6-9.

**“My Birthright.”** (1876)

Lines 13-14: If One...unseen of me, to die. Romans 5:8, I Timothy 1:15-16.

**“A Neighborhood Incident.”** (1885)

Line 51: Drive His starving sheep. Matthew 9:36 & 10:6, John 10:3, and others.

Line 52: Our good Lord Christ, on the heights divine. Luke 16:20-25.

**“A New Thanksgiving.”** (1910)

Line 2: For false gods set on high. II Kings 17:15, Matthew 24:24, and others.

Line 6: The snake that charms the dove. Genesis 3:13.

Lines 11-12: Thou who art, and wast, and shalt be. Revelation 22:13.

**“Night and the Deserter.”** (1858)

Lines 5-8. The stars again...and she is sleeping low! Job 3:9-10.

**“A Night and Morning—1862-3.”** (1864)

Line 30: The soul’s myrrh-offering. Matthew 2:11, John 19:39.

**“The Night Cometh.”** (1888)

Title: The Night Cometh. John 9:4.

Line 7: Blew in Eden ere the Snake had come. Genesis: chapter 3.

**“The Night-Moth’s Comment.”** (1882)

Line 4: And take one’s ease. Luke 12:19-21.

Line 10: Man’s poor dusty vanity. Genesis 3:19, Ecclesiastes 3:20 & 1:2.

**“No Help.”** (1877)

Lines 29-30: God cannot break His own dark Law. Matthew 5:17-18.

**“One from the Dead.”** (1871)

Line 27: I would believe; help Thou my unbelief. Mark 9:24.

Lines 31-32: Thorns were in the place of...hair. Matthew 27:29, John 19:2-5.

Lines 33-36: That Hands...torn with Nails. John 20:25.

**“An Orphan’s Birthday.”** (1859)

Lines 21-24. When on the cross...with an undying sorrow, too! Matthew 27:27-29.

**“The Poetry of Heaven.”** (1858)

Lines 5-8. Thy verse is set...thunderous marches driven. Isaiah 6:1-4.

**“A Prettier Book.”** (1874)

Lines 21-22: Each wedding guest has wedding garments on. Matthew 22:8-12.

**“Pro Patria.”** (1891)

Line 33-34: Wind that blows you whither it listeth? John 3:8.

Lines 44-45: Sins they are as scarlet...whiter than wool. Isaiah 1:18.

**“A Queen at Home.”** (1876)

Lines 15-16: I hold a cross...for a light. Matthew 10:38 & 16:24, Luke 9:23 & 14:27.

**“The Queen of Spain.”** (1880)

Lines 15-17: Last Sacrament...that pleasant bread. Matthew 26:26, John 6:35.

**“Questions of the Hour.”** (1871)

Line 1: Angels wear white. John 20:12.

Lines 17-20: How many drops are in the sea... Job: chapter 38:16 ff.

**“Rachael at the Lodge.”** (1893)?

Lines 31-32: Wise-men’s star, out of the East is shining on her baby’s bed. Matthew 2:2.

Line 34: Thorn-stabbed head. Matthew 27:29, John 19:1-5.

Line 36: Still that cry, that cry. Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:18.

**“The Sermon of a Statue.”** (1886)

Line 30: Writ but one word, and that—Vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2.

**“Shapes of a Soul.”** (1867)

Line 23: Lamb and Good Shepherd. John 10: 11-15.

Line 24: By the still waters. Psalm 23:2.

**“The Sight of Trouble.”** (1880)

Line 17: The wind that blows it everywhere. John 3:8.

**“A Sister of Mercy.”** (1871)

Line 2: Christ’s promise in the Crucifixion tale. Luke 23:43.

**“Something Wanted.”** (1877)

Lines 18-19: Under the sun...nothing new. Ecclesiastes 1:9. (Attributed to Solomon.)

**“Sorrow.”** (1859)

Lines 17-18. Ask its Priest...the infinite universe! Hebrews 5:5-6.

Line 27. Coiled the Serpent over Eden’s flowers! Gen. 3:1-4

Lines 37-38. The lake of fire...poured by Lucifer himself! Rev. 20:14-15.

**“The Statue-Worshiper.”** (1858)

Lines 5-12. He is so wondrous bright...maddening beauties rife. Deut. 29:16-19.

**“The Story of a Storm.”** (1889)

Line 3: We didn’t have any dove or ark. Genesis 8:8-12.

**“Talk about Ghosts.”** (1871)

Line 19: All the preacher calls vanity here. Ecclesiastes 1:2. Theme of whole book.



**“Telling a Fortune.”** (1877)

Lines 15-16: If Eve...but die on her breast. Genesis: chapter 3, II Corinthians 11:3.

**“That New World.”** (1875)

Line 8: Nothing is ours. Luke 12:16-21.

Lines 21-28: Something...outside of this world. Luke 16:26-31.

**“The Thought of Astyanax Beside Iulus.”** (1885)

Line 1: All the doves begin to moan. Isaiah 59:11, Nahum 2:7.

Line 5: Reaches back to Eden. Genesis: chapters 2 & 3.

Line 24: Been dust three thousand years. Genesis 3:19, and others.

**“Three Years To-Night.”** (1860)

Line 51. Like lost angels out of Heaven. II Peter 2:4, Jude 1:6.

**“To Ella.”** (1859)

Lines 43-44. Solemn mystery of life...made plain—at last. Romans 16:25, Eph. 1:9-10.

**“To Marian Asleep.”** (1864) Lines 39-40.

Line 30: Of Death’s great Shadow. Psalm 23:4.

Lines 39-40: Crown of thorns. Matthew 27:29, John 19:2,5.

**“To a Portrait of My Mother.”** (1858)

Lines 6-8. The cold stars...God’s bright mysteries! Rev. 1:20.

Lines 14-17. And then I’ve longed...beneath Eternity’s still veil. Eccl. 3:11.

**“To ‘A Thing of Beauty’.”** (1859)

Line 6. The winged glories nearest to the Throne. Rev. 4:6-8.

**“A Tragedy in Western Woods.”** (1880)

Lines 23-24: She was a widow...her only son. Luke 7:11-15.

Line 32: After we drink the cup. Matthew 26:39, John 18:11.

Line 39: The utter light of Paradise. Luke 23:43, Matthew 4:16.

**“Two Veils.”** (1876)

Lines 7-8: Faith in man...Faith in God. Matthew 15:9, I Corinthians 2:13.

**“The Unknown Dark.”** (1857)

Line 9. Years go by...with a fiery brand. Isaiah 50:11.

Line 23. Through the Vale of Shadows. Psalm 23:4.

**“The Vanquished.”** (1859)

Lines 33-36. Thou must fall...Lucifer...thy might is o’er. Luke 10:18.

**“A Voyage to the Fortunate Isles.”** (1874)

Line 40: Casts pearls before them—oh, the swine! Matthew 7:6.

**“The Wall Between.”** (1880)

Theme of whole poem. Could be a separate essay.

**“A Warning.”** (1859)

Lines 10-11. Fire from Heaven...a portion of thy fate! Gen. 19:24-25, Luke 12: 49.

**“We Two.”** (1874)

Line 4: God’s will is the best. Psalm 143:10, Matthew 21:28-32. Theme of poem.

Lines 9-10: Arrow that flieth by night...pestilence walking by day. Psalm 91:5-6.

Line 11: The clod in the valley. Job 21:33.

Line 23: Lo! I am well pleased. Matthew 3:17.

**“Wild Words—But True.”** (1859)

Line 31. Heaven’s most splendid star. Matthew 2:9-10.

Line 32. Eve’s last blushes linger. Gen. 3:7.

**“A Woman’s ‘No’.”** (1903)

Line 16: Words of honey. Proverbs 16:24.

**“Word of Counsel.”** (1880)

Line 7: Sit your own watch—others will surely sleep. Matthew 26:41, and others.

**“A Word with a Skylark.”** (1892)

Line 6: Worm-eaten through and through. Isaiah 51:8, Mark 9:48.

Line 7: Waste of grave-dust. Genesis 3:19, and others.

Line 10: There was an apple-tree. Genesis 2:16-17.

**“The Worth of Fame.”** (1860)

Line 50. Ere he risked his treasure. II Cor. 4:7.

Lines 58-59. Coming in the clouds...mocked upon the cross! Matthew 24:29-31.

Line 90. God’s fire-brand was to the brow of Cain! Gen. 4:15.

**“Worthless Treasure.”** (1875)

Lines 29-30: How bitter...to learn his treasure was not true. Luke 12:13-21.

**“A Year—MDCCCLX.”** (1864)

Many allusions throughout the poem. Could be a separate essay.