

GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

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And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth (Gen. 7:10).

John Newton, who lived from 1725 until 1807, was at one time a slave trader transporting victims from Africa to America. Ultimately this notorious sea captain became an ordained minister in the Anglican church. His influence was felt throughout Britain, and although his life-span was eighty-two years, some of his hymns will last for ever. He spoke incessantly of the grace of God which had miraculously changed his life and, when close to death, exclaimed, "My memory is almost gone, but I remember two things. That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." Engraved on his tombstone in the parish graveyard at Olney, England, is an inscription, which he wrote:

John Newton, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy.

He requested those words be placed on his grave so that the testimony given throughout his ministry might continue. He was one of the greatest evangelical preachers of the eighteenth century, and among the first clergymen to become interested in church hymnals. Among his many compositions was the hymn which has become an international favorite. Amazing Grace has won for itself an abiding place in the hearts of innumerable Christians. The first and last verses of this inspired poetry cannot be forgotten.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound-
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

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When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

God's Grace Extended

After seven days (Gen. 7:10).

Long ago when the world was young, a baby was born who was destined to become famous. He was not of royal lineage. and yet he became better known than kings. His father, Enoch, was a prophet who daily walked with God. When the man saw the child for the first time, God whispered, "You must call him Methuselah." As far as is known, that name has only been used once. Dr. Lang, the noted commentator, says it was prophetic. "It shall not come until he die." Enoch was capable of foretelling the future, and since the great flood came in the year the man died, it is impossible to dispute the accuracy of the prediction.

Methuselah lived for nine hundred and sixty-nine years. His longevity is easily explained. The extent of God's mercy

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was indicated by the length of the man's life. Noah, for instance, lived 950 years. The longer he lived, the more opportunities Noah had to preach. It was truly amazing that Jehovah extended His period of grace for nearly a thousand years.

Nevertheless, the people were too blind to see the significance of what was taking place. There was no reason why the Lord should care for such sinful people, but He did!

Noah never lost an opportunity to warn the people who came to see his ship. The audience must have been large, for the vessel was a great attraction. The strange old preacher evidently had quaint ideas, for he predicted there would be no need to take the ark to the ocean; it would come to him. When animals of all kinds began to arrive, the excitement of the onlookers increased enormously; this was the world's first circus. Calmly, Noah proceeded with the embarkation, and finally, he and his family entered the ark and the door was closed.

The onlookers were probably amused, and if gambling were known at the time, the bookmakers were soon offering odds

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regarding the reappearance of the foolish old man. How could people exist for days in a polluted atmosphere? They were either mentally deranged or fools! The ship was ready to sail, and every necessity had been foreseen. Probably Noah said to his sons, "Let's go," but the Lord whispered, "Not yet." He waited seven days to give foolish people another week in which to seek admittance into God's ship of destiny.

God's Grace Expanded

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Num. 9:9-11).

The eating of the Passover Feast was one of the most solemn occasions in the Hebrew year. Every person was commanded to participate, for this recalled the time when God redeemed Israel from bondage. The commemoration was so important that every parent was responsible for the spiritual education of children. Boys and girls had to be instructed how salvation was made possible through the blood of the lamb. Throughout its long history the nation obeyed that special commandment, and even Jesus joined with others in observing the ancient custom. He gave to it a new meaning by substituting what is now called the Last Supper. The Hebrews honored and revered the Passover more than any other festival, and it has been estimated that during the life of Christ more than three million people attended the feast.

And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day. And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: Wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer the offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel? And Moses said unto them,

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Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you (Num. 9:6-8).

Moses was very wise. He had not encountered this problem earlier and had no wish to make a mistake. The questioners were instructed to wait until the problem had been presented before God. It is interesting that for these men Jehovah ordered a second Passover to be arranged thirty days after the first one. This provided an extra opportunity for commercial travelers who journeyed "afar off" and for unclean people to take advantage of God's expanded grace. Defilement of any kind prevented a worshiper from attending the feast, and all graves had to be marked with white signs to warn people about contamination. Every person was obliged to observe this law. That God was willing to arrange another Passover was evidence of His great compassion.

The Hebrews believed they only were recipients of divine blessings. Gentiles were considered to be unclean and undesirable. It was difficult for self-righteous people to believe other nations were also precious in the sight of God. The cleansing of Naaman, the leper, and the acceptance of Ruth, the maiden from Moab, were not favorite stories among the Hebrews. It was even more difficult for Pharisees to believe God could love Gentiles. When the children of Israel heard the first Passover command, they discovered what was in God's

mind. When they learned of the second Passover to be held thirty days later, they knew what was in His heart.

God's Grace Exhausted

And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me, For I will at this time send ALL MY PLAGUES upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth (Exod. 9:13-14).

At the height of their power the Pharaohs of Egypt were

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among the greatest military people in existence. Their army was feared by all other nations. No one is sure how the immense pyramids and sphinx were built. During one of my visits to Egypt, I saw the immense preparation being made by the Japanese who thought they could emulate the example of the ancient builders. They planned to erect a new pyramid alongside the old one. They were given permission by the Egyptian government on the condition that if they succeeded, they would dismantle their structure as soon as it was finished. When next I went to Cairo, the equipment had been removed, for the foreigners had abandoned their project. How the original structures were made may remain a secret forever.

During their captivity the children of Israel provided unlimited labor for the taskmasters and perhaps played some part in the erection of those massive monuments.

The Hebrews were slaves for four hundred years and during that time learned how Egyptians worshiped many gods. Each village had its own deity, and pottery unearthed by the archaeologists suggests that animals, stars, and other things were objects of veneration. It was during the latter part of this period that Pharaoh exhausted the patience of God. Moses was told that

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the Lord would harden the heart of his antagonist (see Exod. 7:3). Later Jehovah allowed the ancient author to understand the true condition of the king who hardened his own heart. Pharaoh was determined to prevent the escape of his captives and opposed every attempt to release them (see Exod. 8:15). The Egyptians worshiped images that could be seen and could not understand how their captives revered One who was invisible.

One wonders why God continued His efforts to change Pharaoh's attitude. The plagues were episodes in a divine attempt to destroy the man's animosity, and Pharaoh's destruction proves that frequently even God becomes frustrated and helpless. The Lord's patience with sinful men is very great, but it can end! He says "COME NOW and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18). There may never be a tomorrow. The judgment of God only falls upon people who reject His mercy. No man will be able to say to Him, "If you had only given to me one additional opportunity, I might have responded."

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