

# Glorious Things

## *Springs of Life in the Torrents of Death*

**Ps 87:1** *A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. A Song.*

On the holy mount stands the city he founded;

<sup>2</sup> the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.

<sup>3</sup> Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah

<sup>4</sup> Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush-- "This one was born there," they say.

<sup>5</sup> And of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; for the Most High himself will establish her.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD records as he registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah

<sup>7</sup> Singers and dancers alike say, "All my springs are in you."

**88:1** *A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.*

O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

<sup>2</sup> Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry!

<sup>3</sup> For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength,

<sup>5</sup> like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.

<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah

**<sup>8</sup> You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape;**

<sup>9</sup> my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.

<sup>10</sup> Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah

<sup>11</sup> Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?

<sup>12</sup> Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

<sup>13</sup> But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

<sup>14</sup> O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?

<sup>15</sup> Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.

<sup>16</sup> Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

<sup>17</sup> They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.

**<sup>18</sup> You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness."**

Psalm 87-88

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## ***AMAZING GRACE***

**JOHN NEWTON** (1725-1807) was born in 1725, his Catholic father was a shipmaster in the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup> The following biography is from the *wiki* on **John Newton** and the *wiki* on Amazing grace, last accessed Nov 13, 2017.

Protestant mother died when he was six, after which time he was sent to a boarding school where he was abused. When the young Newton was eleven, he went on his first voyage with his father, sailing another six times before the Sr. Newton retired in 1742.

John had **grown to love the water**, and thus signed on with a merchant ship, sailing the Mediterranean like his father before him. But he was headstrong and a fool. He renounced the faith of his upbringing writing, “**Like an unwary sailor who quits his port just before a rising storm, I renounced the hopes and comforts of the Gospel at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail me.**” Soon thereafter, he began a pattern of nearly dying, examining his relationship to God, then relapsing.

He would openly mock his captain and compose obscene poems and songs about him, using the worst words the skipper had ever heard (as a sailor, that’s saying a lot), and even creating new ones to “**exceed the limits of verbal debauchery.**” You can imagine how that went over. Newton tried to desert and was punished in front of the large crew. Stripped and tied, he was flogged eight dozen times. He thought long and hard about murdering the

captain and committing suicide **in the watery grave** below. At various times, he was almost starved to death, imprisoned at sea, chained, and finally enslaved on a plantation in West Africa where he was viciously mistreated by the slave trader's wife.

Years later, he was rescued and returned to England. On the way, the ship encountered a **terrible storm** and almost sank. In the middle of the night, Newton awoke to the cold sprays of sea water gushing into his cabin. He cried out to God. The cargo moved and plugged the hole, and the ship drifted to safety.

Ironically, upon his homecoming, Newton was offered a position aboard another slave ship headed for the West Indies. He became seriously ill and in 1749 professed faith in Christ. It took him several years before finally renouncing the slave trade, and forty years later he took up the cause of abolition with **William Wilberforce**, apologizing saying, “[My] confession, which ... comes too late ... will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”

It was surely his **love of the sea** which caused Newton to write his second most famous hymn. Based off Psalm 87, you can especially hear it in the second verse:

See the **Streams of living waters**,  
Springing from eternal love,  
Well supply they sons and daughters,  
And all fear of want remove;  
Who can faint while such a **river**  
Ever **flows** their thirst t' assuage?  
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,  
Never fails from age to age.

These thoughts are inspired by the last verse of the psalm, “**Singers and dancers alike say, ‘All my springs are in you’**” (Ps 87:7). The song’s title is taken from its third verse, “**Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah**” (3).

John Newton was no saint, but with such a background his most famous hymn really comes alive. “**Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.**” Newton seems to have been able to grasp this truth because he was truly a wretched scoundrel who continually turned away

from God and back again to sin. Would that all people would learn to see themselves as Newton knew himself to be. Instead of thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, looking in the mirror and proclaiming, “I’m pretty good,” the reality is, compared to a Holy God, we are all John Newton rebelling at sea.

When you come to see yourself that way and grace comes alive, songs like *Amazing Grace* and *Glorious Things* take on not merely cultural, but personal meaning for you. But another way is needed to grasp their message besides looking inward. In fact, only looking inward will lead not to a proclamation of “Hallelujah,” but either “Hurray for me!” or “Woe is me!” This is why you need something more, something outside of yourself that can turn your despair into praise. You need a word that can teach your heart that **God has found a way to forgive your sin.**

In the rarely sung 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of *Amazing Grace*, Newton foreshadows this:

In evil long I took delight  
Un-awed by shame or fear;  
‘Til a new object met my sight

And stopped my wild career.

What was that “new object” that Newton saw? And how did he come to identify it?

He was obviously reading the Bible. The text assigned to *Amazing Grace* is **1 Chronicles 17:16-17**, “And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who *am* I, O LORD God, and what *is* mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And *yet* this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast *also* spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God” (in the KJV, because that’s what he had). These verses are David’s reaction to the prophet Nathan’s words that God was going to preserve David’s lineage forever. In this way, Nathan is cryptically predicting the human birth of Jesus Christ.

But what I want to invite you to consider this morning is another way of understanding God’s amazing grace, through the two psalms we will look at today. The first is Psalm 87 and its **Glorious Things** that are spoken. The second is Psalm 88. A stark contrast to 87, it is one of the bleakest songs in the Psalter, but one that surely would have

caught the attention of a man so enraptured with the sea. I want to propose that perhaps Newton discovered the editorial secret these two psalms read together hold that we will uncover this morning and it was also in his mind when he wrote *Amazing Grace*. It is a secret that I pray will bring God's that song and its message to new life again for you.

This secret contrasts two very different psalms with one common theme: **water**. As we look at this, I cry to you with another John, “Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us” (1Jn 3:1). For truly, what we will see today displays a love so deep that no mind can fathom it. It can only hear it, believe it, embrace it, and rejoice in it. And it is that much starker when the songs are read together.

## *LINKING PSALMS 87-88*

Even though they are so very different, two things cause me to consider Psalms 87-88 together. The **first** I have mentioned is the **theme of water** (which also ties these two to **Psalm 89**, as we will see next time). Psalm 87's very last words describe the singers and dancers of the temple of Israel shouting for joy, “All my springs are in you” (Ps 87:7).



Psalm 87 is about Jerusalem and Mt. Zion, the city God founded upon the ancient mountain of Melchizedek. But few realize that Jerusalem's main source of water is actually a spring. If it weren't for this spring, there would be no Jerusalem.

The **Gihon Spring** on the east side of the city is the source of Jerusalem's water. This particular spring **begins in a cave under the ground**. In ancient times, it flowed into the pool of Siloam where Jesus healed the blind man. Even earlier, it was the place where Hezekiah built his famous tunnel to escape the Assyrian army that was bearing down upon the Holy City.

Springs are fountains of the great deep that seep up through the crust of the earth and burst forth upon the land in an eternal flow of life-giving liquid. This water does not come from the sky in the normal way, but from an invisible source far below. To an ancient person, a miracle! Therefore, the spring stands as a metaphor for life that is given in a supernatural way, by God himself.

But the **springs of life** in Psalm 87 give way to **torrents of death** in Psalm 88. The gentle trickle of water in the former becomes a deluge of destruction in the latter. The

two most obvious water images in Psalm 88 are “waves” (Ps 88:7) and a “flood” (88:17). However, it speaks much about the place where “the dead,” “the slain” (5), the “departed” (10) go in the OT. It is called Sheol (3), the “pit,” “regions of dark deep” (6), “Abaddon,” “darkness,” and the “land of forgetfulness” (12).

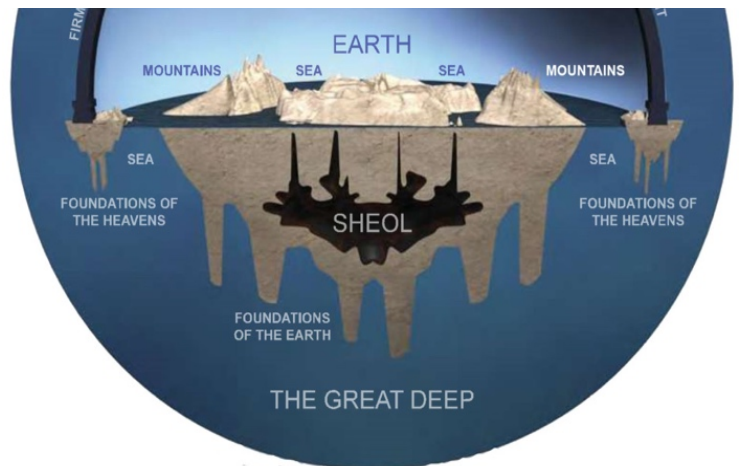
Most people do not realize that the conception of the place of the dead—Sheol in Hebrew, Hades in Greek, was a huge pit underground surrounded on all sides *by water*, a perfect complementary image to the Gihon’s source in that cave. Yet, when read together, Psalm 88 with is actually the counterpart to the springs of Jerusalem.

## Psalm 87



Gihon Spring, Jerusalem

## Psalm 88



Sheol: The Watery Grave

The [second link](#) between the songs is found in the [superscription](#). You won't see this in the English, because the translators want to make it more readable to us. But Psalm 87 begins literally: *Of the sons of Korah, a psalm, a song*. On the other hand, Psalm 88 reverses it: *A song, a psalm, of the sons of Korah*. This is quite unusual for superscriptions as it creates a literary chiasm linking the two songs:

- A. Of the sons of Korah (Ps 87:1)
- B. A psalm
- C. A song
- C<sup>1</sup>. A song (Ps 88:1a)
- B<sup>1</sup>. A Psalm
- A<sup>1</sup>. Of the sons of Korah

Read together, these two songs are going to teach us of the extraordinary depths of the love that God has for his people, but it comes in a most surprising dichotomy, especially when you consider that they were placed together like this hundreds of years before the consummation of their teaching would be understood by anyone. Let's turn to them and discover what I'm talking about.

## *PSALM 87: GOD'S LOVE FOR ZION*

Psalm 87 sets us by proclaiming **God's overwhelming love for Zion**. Why does God love it? **First**, it is his city. “**On the holy mount stands the city he founded**” (**Ps 87:1**). This is a remarkable thing to say, given that it is usually called the City of David. And yet, long before this, God swore that *he* would make *his* Name dwell here, and that this is what would make it special (**Deut 12:5**; etc.). The holy mount is special because God chose it, not because David or any other man did.

**Second**, when you come to an ancient city, you first arrive at gates. “**The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob**” (**2**). This is also remarkable, because those dwelling places include the entirety of the Promised Land, which also belongs to God. But Zion is where his special Shekinah-Glory presence is resides. This is his very special dwelling on earth. Through those gates, into the temple he told David to build.

**Next** comes the statement from Newton's song. “**Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah**” (**3**). We **pause** here, I believe, not only because of what we

have just heard, but in anticipation of what we will soon hear. Even few Christians have really understood the meaning of the things that come next. So we pause.

Then we read, “Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—‘This one was born there,’ they say” (4). The names in the list are fascinating. **Babylon** is the great enemy of God’s people in the OT. **Tyre and Sidon** are port cities of the Canaanites, a major enemy of God’s people in the OT. **Cush** is Ethiopia, the land of the queen of Sheba. Added together, they surround the Holy Land.

But the first is probably the most interesting. The pointing (that is, the vowels added by later medieval scribes) of *RHB* is not that of the Prostitute of Jericho (רַהַב, Rahab), but of the dragon, **the sea monster** (רַהַב, Rahab from **Job 9:13; Ps 89:10; Isa 51:9**; etc.). Since the monster lived in the sea, and since Egypt was destroyed by God in the sea, the word became a term of “**mocking, derisive contempt for a people who had dared to stand against the living God.**”<sup>2</sup> **Egypt** is Rahab, the do-nothing (**Isa 30:7**).

Ronald Allen explains the point:

<sup>2</sup> Ronald B. Allen, “[Psalm 87, a Song Rarely Sung](#),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 138.

But here is the wonder: The term **בְּהַרְרֵי**, “the dragon people,” is used here of those who have come to worship the Lord. That is, this psalm turns the joke on its head. Some of the worshipers of God in Jerusalem had come from what formerly had been an enemy nation, a nation that had been derided by Israel’s poets. Yet, there they were, the “dragon people” amid the Hebrew worshipers!<sup>3</sup>

Another way of putting it would be that the people of the Serpent and most vile haters of Israel and are not only welcome, but are actually being considered by God as if they had been born in the glorious city where God dwells. Do you think the Jews understood what they were singing? Do you understand it?

We now need to ask the question, “**How?**” How can devil worshiping aliens be considered natives of the holy city of God? The Psalm tells you. “**And of Zion it shall be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her’; for the Most High himself will establish her**” (5). The thing is, they of course

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



were *not* born in Zion. They were born in their own nations. Yet, it is *as if* they were born in Zion.

Just here, it is vital to look beyond the physical world to the spiritual world behind it by asking, “[What is Zion?](#)” Clearly, if people are being born here who are not actually born here, we need to investigate this question. “Zion” is only mentioned a handful of times in the NT. Listen to how it puts Zion and “birth” together.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...” ([Heb 12:22-23](#)). “In this way, all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘*The Deliver will come from Zion*’” ([Rom 11:26](#); cf. [Isa 59:20-21](#)). Paul explains it this way in Galatians, “Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery [think Newton] with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, ‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the

one who has a husband” (Gal 4:25-27). What does all this mean?

The Lord Jesus explained this to Nicodemus, even though he was a Jew. For the fact of the matter is, he needed to understand the truth as much as anyone. “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10). Jesus was speaking about a new birth. In other words, being born in Zion in Psalm 87 is an OT reference to the new birth, and Zion itself is Christ’s bride—the church. As Revelation teaches, “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev 21:2-3). This is why I said behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called sons of God!

And in Psalm 87:6 something even more remarkable is said. “The LORD records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’ Selah.” Who is “this one?” It could be any one of the peoples individually. But some scholars have seen this as reference to “the birth of a prince who will



continue a royal dynasty.”<sup>4</sup> When read with Psalm 88, nothing could be closer to the truth. This is why even though he would technically be born in Bethlehem, just two miles away (**Micah 5:2; Matt 2:1-16**), Isaiah can say, “**A Redeemer will come from Zion**” (**Isa 59:20; cf. Rom 11:26**).

Thus, the song concludes with our “spring” verse. The singers and dancers of Israel shout, “**Spring up, O Well. The Living Water has come upon us.**” What a joyous, rich, and hopeful song that displays glorious grace and love to you.

## ***PSALM 88: GOD’S WRATH UPON THE KING***

This takes us to the remarkable Psalm 88 and its nearly complete reversal of theme. From joy and shouting at the prospect of new life, to the **lamentation** and **discouragement** of immanent death. Its superscription adds to that of Psalm 87. It is “**To the Choirmaster**” (“For the End”) and is therefore another future oriented song. It is “**according to the Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil [Wisdom] of Heman the**

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<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1982), 176-79, cited in Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, vol. 20, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 388.

Ezrahite” (Ps 88:1). *Mahalath Leannoth* is not understood. It may refer to an instrument and a form of chanting. Particularly, as scholars ancient (Jerome, Luther) and modern (Dahood) argue, it may have been a kind of antiphonal song, where one group sings and another responds, like the Israelites did between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (Josh 8:33). We will return to this later. More interestingly for now, the word *mahalath* may be derived from *hll* meaning “to pierce” and referred to holes in the ground like pits, which fits the context in more than one way.<sup>5</sup>

The opening lines set the tone. “O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you” (1). Something is obviously terribly wrong.

“Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry!” (2). The only solution is to go before the throne of God and beg for help. “For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol” (3). We will not yet learn what the cause of this horror is. Because first, we must feel the weight of it ourselves. Thus, for five gut-wrenching verses we enter into his pain...

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<sup>5</sup> Tate, 395.

“I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit, in regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah” (4-7).

We are confronted with **a man closing in on death**. He is a man whom God has rejected. He is a man who knows the wrath of God upon him. You might say he is **smitten, stricken, and afflicted**. He is a man whom all others look and scoff at, for there is no hope for him. He is doomed to die.

You may feel this way from time to time. And when you do, you can sing this song. But very few of us have ever actually been in this kind of a condition. Not really. Not yet. Many believers in history *have* been in this condition, and such a song is truly salve for their wounds. For in crying out to God, the fresh springs of Living Water that he can heal even the most afflicted of souls. In fact, this song may have

been used as a kind of penitential song in rituals associated with healing from illness.<sup>6</sup>

But ultimately, and probably even firstly, this is not just any old man. This song is “a picture of its Davidic king being consigned to the realm of death.”<sup>7</sup> And as such, it becomes the reply to the grace of Psalm 87. In fact, though it’s message is about death, it’s purpose is to show the depths of grace and love that God has for those he will give new life to. As such, this is a Messianic Psalm and it begs a question that no one in the OT ever understood clearly. “What kind of a divine representative is this who suffers affliction and abandonment to the point of death?”<sup>8</sup> Before answering more fully, look at how the song develops from here.

“You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape...” Along with the last verse, this becomes as close to a refrain as you will get in this song. It continues, “...my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you” (Ps 88:8-9). There

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<sup>6</sup> See Mowinckel (PIW, II, 210) and Goulder (The Psalms of the Sons of Korah, 202) in Tate, 394-95 n. 1d.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Cole, *The Message of Book III*, 170.

<sup>8</sup> Cole, 171.

are echoes of these words in the NT at the death of Christ, such as “And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things” (Luke 23:49).<sup>9</sup> The Suffering Servant of Isaiah is the suffering singer of Psalm 88.

He then cries aloud about the nature of death and its relation to God. “Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah” (10). Pause. We will return to this verse, because its answer is surprising. But there are some things about this we should look at. “The departed” is literally the *Rephaim*. These are the giants of old, who became the wandering demons of the NT. Is this word chosen because of the supernatural attack that is going on against the Singer? This would be fairly speculative, except that the next verse reinforces it.

“Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon” (11). Again, this is more than a question of not being able to praise God because you are dead. *Abaddon* is Hebrew; the Greek equivalent is

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<sup>9</sup> See David A. Jones, *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Ps 88:8–Lk 23:49; David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 400.

**Apollyon**. He is the “angel” of the Abyss in **Revelation 9:11**. Shortened, he is **Apollo**, one of the most wicked gods of the Greek pantheon, whose name means **Destroyer** or Destruction. There are OT reasons why the Apostle says that if the Archons (supernatural entities) of this age understood this, they never would have crucified the Lord of Glory (**1Co 2:7**). But I’m getting ahead of myself.

The descent to the underworld continues. “**Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?**” (**12**). The land of forgetfulness has a Greek equivalent called the fields of **Elysium**. This is the good side of Hades, but nevertheless a place where such questions are obvious. *Or are they?* The two words used (Wonders and Righteousness) easily make us think of the Second Person of the Trinity. “**His name shall be called Wonderful**” (**Isa 9:6**). He is “**The LORD our Righteousness**” (**Jer 23:6; 33:16**).

Is it possible that the Word of God, prophesying His coming Passion, is pondering whether even He can withstand death? I do not ask this question regarding the Divine nature, for as God, he knows all things. As God, he is even immune from such questions. But as an angel? As a



man? As a man who *will die*? Do you feel the heavy burden that the Psalm is unveiling to you? Feel the terrors that lay in front of this Man, this Suffering Servant, and behold what manner of love is this? For he had to do it, if you were to be given new life and adopted into the people of God.

“But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Your wrath has seeped over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together” (Ps 88:13-17). Now *he* becomes Rahab, Pharaoh who is hurled into the sea. The waves crash over him. The walls of water close in on him, and crush him.

The semi-refrain, echoing vs. 8 closes out the Psalm. “You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness” (18). This is perhaps the bleakest, most depressing ending of any song in the Psalter. And here we do well to remember that this is a *Maskil*, a Psalm of instruction teaching us wisdom about “The End.” So why do I think these songs were placed together and how is it that they help us understand Amazing Grace in a new and objective way?

## *AMAZING GRACE, THE DEATH OF CHRIST, AND LOVE OF HIS CHURCH*

I said that John Newton really had to take a good, hard look at himself and that when he did, he was able to understand amazing grace *subjectively*. However, as pointed out, there is a second stanza that is rarely sung that looks ahead to something more *objective*, the fountain where grace originates. We saw that he was thinking of David when he wrote Amazing Grace. But maybe he was also thinking of something else. Just here, we come to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> stanzas of this most famous of all songs, lyrics that almost no one knows:

I saw One hanging on a tree, | In agonies and blood  
Who fixed His languid eyes on me | As near His cross I stood.

Sure, never 'til my latest breath | Can I forget that look.  
It seemed to charge me with His death | Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience owned and felt the guilt, | And plunged me in despair;  
I saw my sins His blood had shed, | And helped to nail Him there.



Alas, I knew not what I did, | But all my tears were vain;  
Where could my trembling soul be hid, | For I the Lord had slain.

Given that *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken* is from Psalm 87, and that this song has such close ties to Psalm 88 through a subject so dear to his heart, I find it more than curious that *Amazing Grace* has these lines that can be understood so easily in light of the suffering and death that is depicted in Psalm 88. I'm not saying that Newton did this consciously. But perhaps subconsciously, God used the proximity of Psalm 88 to 87 in such a way that Newton would be inspired to write such incredible lyrics. The tragedy, of course, is that no one knows them.

The thing you must see is how Psalm 88 becomes necessary is Psalm 87 to be true. And as such, God's love becomes overwhelming to the point of tears. God loved you so much that he not only wanted to adopt you into his family so that you could say that Zion is your very birthplace, he made this possible by killing the Son of God, making him suffer such horrible things, so that you could have life. The incredible prophecy that Satan worshipping

Gentiles could be born again and could call the most important place in the world to the LORD home, as if they were born there, is incredible. Behold what manner of love is this? What glorious things we are speaking.

The Son of God paid for your sins in his horrible death that caused him such agony, and it is written down in Psalm 88. That death would see him face the very enemies of hell itself (Abaddon, the Rephaim). Yet, as the song itself asks, “**Will you work wonders for the dead?**” And the answer is not what anyone expected. In this section of the song, as **Martin Luther** puts it, Christ is saying, “**You must raise Me, for You cannot perform wonders for the dead. Nor is there anyone else who can raise the dead, so that You can perform wonders for the revived dead. For physicians will not raise the dead; therefore You alone must do it.**”<sup>10</sup>

He adds, “**In a mystical sense he is speaking of others, those who are to be raised through His resurrection.**” So again, the new birth of those in Psalm 87 can only happen through the death of Psalm 88 and the resurrection it implies. When this happens, the superscription kicks in.

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<sup>10</sup> **Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works, Vol. 11: First Lectures on the Psalms II: Psalms 76-126*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 11 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 188.

Suddenly, you learn **wisdom**. Suddenly, you see Love. Suddenly, you know something glorious and amazing. The reason the song is probably antiphonal now becomes clear. Luther asks, “**What does it mean for one to answer to the other, if not to help complete the same song or the same work and bring it to a perfect end? So also, says the apostle, I may complete the sufferings of Christ which are lacking in my flesh (Col 1:24). This is what it means to suffer together for the purpose of reigning together, to endure together for the purpose of reigning together (2Ti 2:12).**”<sup>11</sup> The reason they are to be read together becomes clear.

Beloved, in your suffering, considering the suffering of Christ who went before you. In the suffering of others, considering the suffering of Christ, who did it for you. And in your contemplation of “**Who am I, that you should show such kindness,**” consider the suffering of Christ, and the giving him over to death of the Father, and the abandonment of the Spirit ... consider God who did not have to do this, but loved you that much that you can now, like John Newton, sing of glorious things and Amazing Grace.

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<sup>11</sup> Luther, 187.

## Amazing Grace (All Lyrics)

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.

In evil long I took delight | Un-awed by shame or fear;  
'Til a new object met my sight | And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree, | In agonies and blood  
Who fixed His languid eyes on me | As near His cross I stood.

Sure, never 'til my latest breath | Can I forget that look.  
It seemed to charge me with His death | Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience owned and felt the guilt, | And plunged me in despair;  
I saw my sins His blood had shed, | And helped to nail Him there.

Alas, I knew not what I did, | But all my tears were vain;  
Where could my trembling soul be hid, | For I the Lord had slain.

A second look he gave which said, | "I freely all forgive!  
"This blood is for thy ransom paid, | "I die that thou mayest live."

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, | And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear | The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares | I have already come.  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, | And grace will lead me home!

The Lord has promised good to me, | His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be, | As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, | And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil | A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, | The sun forbear to shine,  
But God who called me here below | Shall be forever mine!

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 first begun!