

John Newton and “Amazing Grace”

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Sources: <http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps028.shtml>
www.flash.net/~gaylon/jnewton.htm

John Newton was a sailor on the Greyhound, a vessel involved in the Atlantic Slave trade. He had been a sailor from the age of eleven. In March, 1748, the Greyhound was caught in a north Atlantic storm off of the coast of Sierra Leone. The storm ripped its sails and splintered and tore away one side of the ship. The sailors had little hope of survival but they continued to pump out water in an effort to trying to keep the boat afloat. March 21, 1748 was the eleventh day of the storm. Newton, who was too exhausted to pump water, was tied to the helm where he tried to hold the ship to its course. He remained there from one o'clock in the afternoon until midnight.

While waiting for death, John Newton underwent a religious awakening and believed he had experienced God's grace. Although Newton continued as a slave-trader, his life had been transformed. He eventually abandoned the sea and became a Protestant minister. As part of his duties, he composed hymns, including one that described his experience as a slave trader and his eventual redemption. It was called “Amazing Grace.” John Newton also became an activist in the campaigns to end the slave trade and abolish slavery.

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.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

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

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

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 earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, Who called me here below,
Shall be forever mine.

Questions:

1. What different types of work did John Newton do during his lifetime?
2. What caused him to change the way he lived?
3. What evidence is provided that his conversion was sincere?
4. What do we learn about the slave trade from the story of John Newton and “Amazing Grace”?