

**AMAZING GRACE: SIX OF THE EARLIEST KNOWN TUNES**  
**(ONE TUNE FOR EACH VERSE)**

*These notes can be used for a performance of Amazing Grace to the six different tunes*

*[adapt the notes to your own circumstances]*

This background information links with the two files:

**'Amazing Grace: six verses to different melodies.mp3'**

&

**'Amazing Grace: six verses to different melodies.pdf'**

to be found on the website of The John Newton Project: [www.johnnewton.org](http://www.johnnewton.org)

## INTRODUCTION

The hymn *Amazing Grace* was written for **New Year's Day 1773**, when John Newton took his sermon text from **1 Chronicles 17**, a passage in the Bible about King David.

**All six verses of Amazing Grace come from this Bible passage.**

David had wanted to build a temple for the Lord, but the Lord replied in effect, No – I'm building *your* house, a house which will last forever. In this promise the Lord was referring to the Messiah, Jesus, who would be born from David's own 'house,' or descendants. This would be Joseph — as the angel Gabriel proclaimed to the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem almost 1,000 years later, Christ was born 'in the city of David'.

Newton admired David's grateful response to all the Lord had done for him in the past and his wonderful promises to him for the future. Newton encouraged his congregation in Olney to imitate this former shepherd boy's 'thankful heart' as they reflected on their own lives and God's 'past mercies' to them, and, as they entered the New Year, their 'future hopes'. [follow this link for the full sermon]

People often wonder what tune *Amazing Grace* was first sung to. It was not written to any particular tune, but being in the Common Metre there would have been a wide choice of suitable tunes in use at the time. Today the most familiar tune for the hymn is **New Britain**, which wasn't matched to *Amazing Grace* until 1829, twenty-two years after John Newton's death.

*Amazing Grace* was first published in 1779 in a hymnbook by Newton and Cowper called the *Olney Hymns*. It also appeared soon afterwards in a *A Select Collection of Hymns* compiled by the Countess of Huntingdon. Then in 1787, exactly 10 years after its first publication, and while Newton was the rector of St Mary Woolnoth in the heart of the city of London, *Amazing Grace* appeared in a Moravian hymn book called *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren*. Above the hymn is the code 'T14', which stands for 'Tune 14'. So what was **Tune 14**?

#### THE EARLIEST KNOWN TUNES

A few years earlier, in 1784, Christian Gregor had collated all the Moravian hymn tunes from across the country which had been identified as 'Tune 14' in various local hymn books. He published them in his *Choral-Buch enthaltend alle zu dem Gesangbuche der Evangelischen Briider-Gemeinen vom Jahre 1778 gehorige Melodien*. [*Choral-Buchen* would do!]

In this book he listed four versions of 'Tune 14', which he distinguished by the letters **a**, **b**, **c** and **d**. *Amazing Grace* may have been sung to any (or all!) of these four.

The Moravians in London met at Fetter Lane. The leader of their church in England, Benjamin LaTrobe, was invited to join Newton's Eclectic Society in its founding year, 1783. From the Moravian record books we know that Newton and his Anglican friends often worshipped with the Moravians at Fetter Lane. Newton may therefore have sung his own hymn to any one of these tunes. **Certainly these are the earliest known tunes to which we can be sure that *Amazing Grace* was sung.** When we listen to these we can hear what *Amazing Grace* would have sounded like in Newton's lifetime.

[The Choir] will sing a single verse from *Amazing Grace* to each of these four different tunes.

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*[Choose whether to speak about each tune first and then its linked verse, e.g. 'T14a' followed by 'verse 1', leaving the words fresh in people's minds – or you may prefer to do all the spoken pieces on all 6 verses followed by all the music – or whatever variations suits your situation best]*

**T14a** We will hear verse 1 sung to the first of the four options in the Moravian hymnbook – **T14a**. The tune was written much earlier, in 1656, by Adam Krieger. Its title was *Nun sich der Tag geendet hat* (*Now the day has ended*).

Krieger was organist at the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig, and subsequently at the court of Dresden. He played a pioneering role in developing the solo Lied and 'is considered the most varied and original master of the German Baroque song.' This is the tune to his most famous hymn – highly popular in Lutheran churches.

**verse 1:** In the Bible passage Newton preached on that New Year's Day, the Lord reminded David (v7) that he was just a shepherd boy when God chose him to be king. That reminder overwhelmed David. 'Who am I, O Lord God' he asked (v16), 'that thou hast brought me hitherto?' So where were you, asked Newton, when the Lord found you? Miserable, rebellious, lost in unbelief, blinded by the things of this world – in fact, a wretch.

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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**T14b** The tune the choir will now sing, **T14b**, was called: *Lobt Gott ihr Christen, allzugleich* (Praise God, you Christians all the same) by Nikolaus Herman, written in 1550. Herman was a cantor and teacher in Bohemia, a strong supporter of Martin Luther, and a prolific hymn writer. Many of Herman's hymns

were written for teaching children. This tune is from one of the most popular German Christmas hymns. It was later taken up by **Bach** in 1713, in his **Chorale Prelude for Organ** (BWV 609 Orgelbüchlein ).

**verse 2:** Newton described the moment that he cried out to God for mercy in a severe storm in the middle of the Atlantic: ‘being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere: and just as I was returning from him, I said, almost without any meaning, ‘If this will not do, the Lord have mercy on us!’ I was instantly struck with my own words, What mercy can there be for me?’ I expected that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no more; and though I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were indeed true; yet still I was but half-convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought if the Christian religion were true, I could not be forgiven. When I saw beyond all probability, there was still hope of respite, and heard about six in the evening that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope; I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour: I began to pray.’ Forty-eight years later, on his annual celebration of that ‘great turning day’, Newton wrote: ‘Oh! It was Mercy indeed to save a wretch like me, and to hear my half formed prayer, made upon a peradventure, whether there was a God to hear me or not.’ In his *Amazing Grace* sermon, Newton reminded his congregation to reflect on the time in their own lives when they had called out to God in trouble, and recall ‘the never to be forgotten hour when he enabled us to hope in his mercy.’

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

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**T14c** The tune, **T14c**, we will hear for this verse is *Nun danket all' und bringet Ehr* (Now give thanks and bring honour), by Johann Georg Christian Störl, in 1710. Störl was born in Württemberg and became the organist and choir master in Stuttgart. He composed this tune for lyrics by Paul Gerhardt, a highly esteemed hymnwriter and minister in the Lutheran church. It's another tune which Johan Sabastian Bach incorporated into his works, in '**Cantata for a Wedding**' (BWV 195 *Dem Gerechten muss das Licht immer wieder aufgehen* ).

**verse 3:** In 1 Chronicles 17 (v8) the Lord reminded David: '*I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the great men that are in the earth.*' Newton urged his people to recall God's 'providential care preserving us from a thousand seen, millions of unseen dangers, when we knew him not.' It is easy to see how this led him to write:

Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;

Thinking again of David's amazement when he said (v16): 'Who am I, O Lord God, that thou hast brought me **thus far**?', we can draw the same conclusions as to how we reached this point:

'Tis grace has brought **me** safe **thus far**,  
And grace will lead me home.

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**T14d** Tune **14d** is labelled: *Voriges, auf eine andere Art* (previous, in another manner), by Johann Crüger, 1653. This strange title of '*previous*' simply refers to the previous tune, **T14c**. In other words, this **T14d** tune was written for lyrics by the same author as the previous tune had been. The author of both sets of lyrics was Paul Gerhard, a friend and writing companion of composer John Crüger. 'In another manner' in the title explains that it is 'another' tune, set to a slightly different version of the

original lyrics by Gerhard. **T14d** was written to accommodate an additional stanza to Gerhard's lyrics. The title could be better expressed as 'The History of Jesus's Passion, in other words'.

Crüger was born in 1598, the son of a German innkeeper. Like Newton's father, he studied for a while under Jesuits. He was one of the most distinguished musical composers of his time, editing *Praxis Pietatis Melica*, a significant German Lutheran hymnal of the 17th century which is still much referred to today. One of Crüger's most famous tunes in use in modern hymnbooks is '*Nun danket alle Gott*' (Now thank we all our God – but avoid confusing – note the *difference* in the wording of the T14c German title, which may seem very similar to this one for non-German speakers!).

**verse 4:** King David rejoiced that God had 'promised this goodness unto thy servant' (v26). Newton lifted this reminder into his hymn:

The Lord has promised good **to me**

David drew confidence from 'the thing that thou hast spoken' (v17), looking forward to when God's promise would be 'established forever'. Newton echoed this confidence in God's word:

His word **my** hope secures

Just as God promised to 'subdue all thine enemies' (v10), so we can trust:

He will **my** shield and portion be

David was overwhelmed how far into the future God's promise would reach – '*for thou hast also spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come*' (v17). This far-reaching faithfulness to His promises touched Newton deeply also, for he saw it would last:

As long as life endures.

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**THE LATER TUNE ‘NEW BRITAIN’**

**(a)** The tune **New Britain** was probably brought into the Appalachian Mountains by immigrating Scots in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We’re going to hear this verse sung to a very interesting early version of the tune **New Britain**, drawn from a collection of hymns published in 1829 in *Columbian Harmony*.

**verse 5:** A wonderful promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17 is when the Lord says to him (v9): ‘Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning.’ This marvellous promise of everlasting peace to come is captured beautifully in Newton’s 5<sup>th</sup> verse of *Amazing Grace*:

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.

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**(b)** This time we will hear a more familiar version of **New Britain**, adapted and harmonised by Edwin O Excell in William Walker’s *Virginia Harmony* 1831

**verse 6:** A short phrase appears 8 times in the passage in 1 Chronicles. It is ‘**for ever**’ (v12,14,22,23,24,27). This must have impressed Newton deeply, for he included in it his very last line. When he wrote this hymn, it was snowing. We can imagine him looking out of his attic study window in Olney, drawing inspiration from the view, which reminded him of a similar verse of Scripture:

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

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**Resources re the tunes:**

*Musical score:* 'Amazing Grace - 6 verses to different melodies.pdf'

*Audio:* 'Amazing Grace - 6 verses to different melodies.mp3'

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**Further Resources on Amazing Grace:**

See here for further resources on Amazing Grace:

[http://johnnewton.org/Groups/283199/The\\_John\\_Newton/new\\_menus/Amazing\\_Grace/AG\\_Resources/AG\\_Resources.aspx](http://johnnewton.org/Groups/283199/The_John_Newton/new_menus/Amazing_Grace/AG_Resources/AG_Resources.aspx)

or as tabled below:

		<b>downloads</b>
sermon	John Newton's 1773 New Year's Day sermon on 1 Chronicles 17:16,17 (which was accompanied by the hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i> , based on the same text and sermon)	<a href="#">continuous</a>
		<a href="#">double-sided leaflet</a>
hymn	the words of John Newton's hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i>	<a href="#">Amazing Grace words</a>
origin	comparison of Scripture verses in 1 Chronicles 17 with Newton's hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i>	<a href="#">table comparing Scripture and hymn verses</a>
ppt	PowerPoint (for congregational singing) of the words (with images) for Newton's hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i>	<a href="#">Amazing Grace ppt words with images</a>
video	video showing how the words for Newton's hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i> were drawn directly from 1 Chronicles 17:16,17	<a href="#">link to vimeo download</a>