

AMAZING GRACE

In Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, the word 'grace' is first defined as 'favor, good will, and kindness.'

Just as a matter of interest, the word 'grace' occurs

- *45 times from Genesis to Acts 9 (when Paul gets saved)*
 - *100 times in Paul's writings,*
- and*
- *25 times in Hebrews through Revelation.*

The first mention of 'grace' in the scriptures was for Noah (not Webster though!):

Gen 6:5-8 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

8 **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.**

God was 'fed up' with man's sinfulness all except for one man, named Noah. God purposed to kill all of mankind, except for Noah. The next verse provides some interesting information about Noah:

Gen 6:9-10 These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

10 And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Yes, the people of the earth were in for death and coming judgment:

Gen 6:11-13 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

12 And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

God told Noah of His plan of death, and also gave Noah and his family the promise of life and salvation:

Gen 6:17-18 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

When you think of everyone alive being so wicked that God was sorry He had even created man, and then you think of just ONE man --- who was actually one JUST man --- among them all --- who was 'worth' saving it seems rather 'logical' that God would want to preserve him (even though later on, we find that Noah planted a vineyard, and got drunk-Gen. 9:20-21).

During a later time, the Bible gives us some insight into the reason God chose to protect three 'certain' men during a food shortage:

Ezek 14:12-14 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,
13 Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it:

14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls **by THEIR righteousness**, saith the Lord GOD.

When Abraham knew the Lord's intent to destroy Sodom, Abraham asked the Lord about destroying the righteous the same as the wicked. God responded that he would not. So even though the word 'grace' isn't used in this passage, God did give grace to the righteous and destroy the wicked:

Gen 18:23-26 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

26 And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

God gave Joseph grace and wisdom in Pharaoh's sight after his brothers sold him into slavery:

Acts 7:9-10 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Moses was another man who found grace in the sight of the Lord, as did the children of Israel:

Exo 33:16-17 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.

17 And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

Gideon received grace in God's sight, and God gave him a miraculous sign to prove it:

Judges 6:16-21 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

Ezra said Israel had 'a little space of grace' from God:

Ezra 9:8 And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

King David found grace in God's sight also:

Acts 7: -- the word of verse -- 45, then verse 46 David; (46) Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

The Psalmist said that grace comes from God:

Psa 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Zechariah promised grace would someday come to Israel:

Zech 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Mary found grace (also called 'favour') with God, in that He chose her to be the mother of the Christ:

Luke 1:26-31 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

When Joseph and Mary took Jesus back to Galilee in Nazareth, the scripture says Christ had the grace (or favour) of God on Him:

Luke 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

John the Baptist even said Christ was 'full of grace' and He brought grace to the believers in Israel:

John 1:14-17 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The believing remnant received grace just after Pentecost:

Ac 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Peter's epistle says the prophets prophesied 'grace' would be given to Israel:

1 Peter 1:10-12 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Peter himself wrote of the grace in the very next verse (after the ones we just read) that Israel will get when God brings them into their kingdom glory. Jesus brought grace to Israel in His first coming ... and He will bring grace 'yet again' to Israel at His second coming:

1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the **grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

Again, Peter is talking with the 'END' in view, as he speaks of the grace of God:

1 Peter 4:7-10 But **the end of all things is at hand**: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Peter began and ended his 2nd epistle with grace.

John began and ended the Revelation with grace.

Their letters were prophetically for a future age when the Little Flock needs to 'endure to the end' through the Great Tribulation, and inherit the kingdom.

Hopefully, if you understand 'right division' of the scriptures, you are aware that 'things are a-changin' all through the book of Acts.

It is a historic record that begins with Israel being offered the kingdom, rejecting it, being set aside, and salvation going to the Gentile nations not because of Israel's acceptance (because they didn't accept their Messiah) but rather in spite of Israel.

Then God raised up a NEW apostle, Saul of Tarsus, changed his name to Paul, gave him revelations that had been a mystery, and told him to get OUT of Jerusalem because they would not hear him.

Barnabas came to see the grace of God:

Acts 11:22-23 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, **when he came, and had seen the grace of God**, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

There was still 'grace' flowing all the way through, but with Paul, something different comes in. Prior to this NEW program God introduced through Paul, they were living under the 'dispensation of the LAW'. That is what Jesus lived under:

Gal 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

The doctrine Paul was teaching made the Jews quite angry. But before Paul could answer, his case was thrown out of court:

Acts 18:12-16 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

16 And he drave them from the judgment seat.

Paul realized that putting people 'under the law' was like putting 'blindness' on them:

2 Cor 3:14-15 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Paul was constantly battling against doctrines where people were trying to put the 'keeping of the law' on the Gentiles:

Gal 5:3-4 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

That phrase 'fallen from grace' is often mis-used to say that people 'lose their salvation' but what Paul is saying, is that, they have 'moved away' from the message of grace --- if they try to be justified by the law, (which they cannot keep ENTIRELY which makes them 'guilty of it all' - James 2:10).

Gal 6:12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

1 Tim 1:5-7 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;

7 **Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.**

They had a big 'pow-wow' in Jerusalem because the Jews were trying to put the Gentiles under the law, and Paul and Barnabas put a stop to it:

Acts 15:1-2 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.
2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Gal. 2:1-10 details that private meeting that took place when Paul communicated to Peter THAT gospel that he preached among the Gentiles, and the details of it.

Then Peter publically acknowledged and agreed with Paul's message:

Acts 15:5-11 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

6 ¶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

But then, later on, Peter 'fell from grace' and went back to his old ways again, and Paul scolded him for it:

Gal 2:11-14 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

By the 18th chapter of Acts, we find Apollos understanding grace from the folks Paul had stayed with:

Acts 18:24-28 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

In chapter 20, we clearly see that now Paul has a 'special title' for his message:

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify **the gospel of the grace of God.**

Paul's 'gospel of grace' also brought in a NEW 'dispensation of grace':

Eph 3:1-5 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

2 If ye have heard of the **dispensation of the grace of God** which is given me to you-ward:

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

1 Cor 9:17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

Here's an example where you can clearly see that God was not yet 'dealing out the dispensation of grace' in 'times past'. Jesus had told His disciples to sell everything they had. That's what He told the rich man to do in order to have eternal life. Jesus also taught them to pray and ask God for their 'daily bread' (in the 'Lord's Prayer' in Matt. 6:11):

Luke 18:22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

Jesus instructed the 'faithful remnant' to sell everything whatever they had for the kingdom God would give to them:

Luke 12:32-33 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

Peter asked Jesus what the reward would be for those who sold everything and followed Him:

Matt 19:27-29 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

That is what they were doing in the first part of the book of Acts:

Acts 2:44-45 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Acts 4:32-37 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for **as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them**, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,
 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

*With that background (about 'selling ALL'), now let's see how the dispensation of grace had not yet begun --- because 'although grace was upon them **all** (vs. 33)' they did not all receive grace when they sinned:*

Acts 5:1-11 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

*Ananias and Sapphira were not living under the 'dispensation of the grace of God' were they? God struck both of them dead for keeping back some of their money and then lying about it. **We don't get that kind of judgment today!***

Paul begins every one of his thirteen epistles with "grace and peace." That's God's 'official attitude' toward the world today.

Just when God's wrath was prophesied to fall, He saved the 'chief of sinners' and made him the 'apostle of grace.' Paul repeatedly makes the claim that God specifically gave him that message:

Eph 3:7-8 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the **grace of God given unto me** by the effectual working of his power.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Paul was fully assured of the responsibility God was doing through him:

1 Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

Paul was the 'due-time testifier'. God committed a special message to Paul, which was never revealed in 'times past' but was hid in God, until the 'due time' to reveal it:

Titus 1:3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;

Paul's gospel is one for 'all' and it was preached 'in due time.' Speaking of Jesus Christ, Paul says:

1 Tim 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified **in due time**.

That is quite different from what Jesus told His disciples. He told of a 'limited atonement'. That's why some people who do not 'rightly divide' the word, see this next verse and get on the wrong track:

Matt 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

*Just as was prophesied about Christ, the scripture says that He would save 'HIS people' **that was Israel:***

Matt 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save **his people** from their sins.

Jesus Himself backed that up with the statement in:

John 4:22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for **salvation is of the Jews**.

Yet, Jesus later gave the apostle Paul a different message one that extended salvation to ALL men through grace:

Titus 2:11 For the **grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,**

With Paul's ministry, God offered GRACE to the entire world. He was not selective with it anymore:

Col 1:5-6 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

6 Which is come unto you, **as it is in all the world;** and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and **knew the grace of God in truth:**

.... a message of salvation that was expressly 'by GRACE;:

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

*Now that message is without the distinction made earlier for Israel. Now it was open for all men, everywhere, **regardless of their nationality:***

Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

.... And when Paul came to the end of his ministry, he was able to make this statement:

2 Tim 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

May we carry that 'grace message' of salvation forth and with boldness proclaim the same 'body of doctrine' that Paul wrote about.

And may we, like Paul, be faithful stewards, who spread the message of the 'mystery program' so people can be both edified and knowledgeable of God's word and what He is doing today.

This is David Dowell, saying "Think About It!"