

Rock of Ages—January's Hymn of the Month 2021

By
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Because so many of the great hymns were written so long ago, the story behind the writing can have more than one story. So it is for *Rock of Ages*, a hymn that even precedes the writing of *Amazing Grace* which was penned in 1779. *Rock of Ages* first appeared in print the same year our founding fathers penned the beginnings of our country. The *Gospel Magazine* was an English publication, and the English preacher, Augustus Toplady, had included an article about man's sin debt. Toplady had calculated that if a man lived to be 80, he would commit over two and a half billion sins, a debt impossible to pay. He closed the article with the poem, *Rock of Ages*, to emphasize man's need of a saviour.

The inspiration for the poem apparently came about by two events in Toplady's life. The first occurred while listening to a sermon by Dr. Daniel Brevint. The good doctor said, "Let not my heart burn with less zeal to follow and serve thee now, when this bread is broken at this table, than did the hearts of thy disciples when thou didst break it at Emmanuel, O Rock of Israel, Rock of Salvation, Rock struck and cleft for me." The second event was a simple thunderstorm in which Toplady was caught. He took shelter in the cleft of a large rock. As the storm raged about him, the words of Dr. Brevint returned to his heart; and by the end of the day, *Rock of Ages* was born.

If you even have the chance to visit Vermont, take time to stop in the town of Barre. There, you will find, *Rock of Ages*, not the hymn, but the granite company that has borrowed the hymn's title. They manufacture head stones from the largest granite quarry in the world. As you look at the great pit from which the great rocks come, you will be reminded that the creator of all of this is the same one who will be our Rock at our time of death.

In the words of Toplady, "While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes shall close in death, when I soar to world's unknown, see thee on thy judgment throne, rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee." This rock is Jesus Christ, the only rock that will last for eternity.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;

Thou must save and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.