



Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus

Text: John Bakewell (1721-1819) &

Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778)

Tune: Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen (1670-1739)

Occasionally a hymn will come to be that has an interesting story and a long history. “Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus” is one of those hymns. Written by John Bakewell and later expanded by either Bakewell himself or Augustus Toplady, it has seen various versions and has been attributed to several authors. No matter its history, it is a hymn with high value as it teaches about Christ’s atoning death and our justification.

The hymn was originally written by John Bakewell in 1757. Bakewell was an English poet, born in Derbyshire, England. He spent a goodly portion of his life as a Methodist itinerant preacher (a travelling preacher). He was well acquainted with John and Charles Wesley. He was also close friends with Augustus Montague Toplady, who we know as the author of “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.” By this friendship Bakewell was able to meet several other hymnwriters who were friends with Toplady. Bakewell anonymously authored a pamphlet of his hymns, entitled *A Collection of Hymns Addressed to the Holy, Holy Triune God*.



Augustus Toplady

The tune was already in use and was written by Johann Freylinghausen. The tune, O DURCHBRECHER, was written by Freylinghausen and published in his 1704 hymnal, *Geistreiches Gesang-Buch*, which was the leading hymnal in Halle, the center of the Pietistic movement. Freylinghausen also wrote 44 original hymns,



Johann Freylinghausen

none of which are in common use in English hymnals today. Unfortunately Freylinghausen suffered from three strokes, the first in 1728 and the second in 1730. Although he recovered quite well from them, a third in 1738 left him completely crippled and he died from it on February 12, 1739.

The hymn, “Hail Thou Once Despised Jesus” began as a two stanza hymn:

Hail, Thou once despised Jesus!	Jesus, hail! Enthroned in glory
Hail, Thou Galilean King!	There forever to abide;
Who didst suffer to release us	All the heavenly host adore Thee
Who didst free salvation bring!	Seated at Thy Father’s side:
Hail, Thou universal Saviour,	Worship, honour, power, and blessing
Who hast borne our sin and shame	Thou art worthy to receive—
By whose merits we find favour	Loudest praises without ceasing
Life is given through Thy name!	Meet it is for us to give.

However, what we now have as stanza two was added as the second stanza, and a new fourth stanza was written, using the second half of the original second stanza (“Worship, honour, power, and blessing...”) as its beginning. As the hymn passed through various English hymnals, the text was altered. Unfortunately as the Calvinists used the hymn they frequently omitted the new second stanza, rejecting especially the “Paschal Lamb” language. At one point, a fifth stanza was added, but in terms of imagery and poetry it did not match the other four and is almost universally rejected as an unwelcomed addition.

For us, this hymn is a clear confession of Christ and His saving work for all men. It clearly preaches the atonement, especially in the second stanza. The second stanza ends with the phrase “Peace is made ‘twixt man and God,” which is explained in that stanza and continued in the third when we sing of Christ’s role as intercessor for us. Finally, the hymn closes with material from Revelation 4 and 5 as we enter the heavenly throneroom and experience the joy of those in heaven who always before Christ. We long to be with them where we will join with them to “Chant Immanuel’s praise.”