

# Scripture Studies

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“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord...” I saiah 1:18

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## Old Testament Study: Exodus 7-11

### The Plagues Upon Egypt, pt. 1, by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

For over eighty years, and probably much longer, the Egyptians had oppressed the Hebrews, and patiently had God borne with their persecution of His people. But the time had arrived when He was to interpose on behalf of His “**firstborn**” (4:22) and take vengeance on those who had reduced Israel to the most servile bondage. The Lord is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, but, “**He will not always chide; neither will He keep His anger forever**” (Psalm 103:9). A succession of terrible judgments therefore now descended upon Pharaoh and upon his land, judgments which are known as “the Plagues of Egypt”. They were ten in number.

**First**, the waters of the Nile were turned into blood (7:14-25).

**Second**, frogs covered the land and entered the homes of the Egyptians (8:1-5).

**Third**, lice was made to attack their persons (8:16-19).

**Fourth**, swarms of flies invaded the houses of the Egyptians and covered the ground (8:20-24).

**Fifth**, a grievous disease smote the cattle (9:1-7).

**Sixth**, boils and sores were sent on man and beast (9:8-12).

**Seventh**, thunder and hail were added to the terrors of these Divine visitations (9:18-35).

**Eighth**, locusts consumed all vegetation (10:1-20).

**Ninth**, thick darkness, which might be felt, overspread the land for three days (10:21-29).

**Tenth**, the firstborn of man and beast were slain (11, 12).

A frightful summary is found in Psalm 78: “**He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and tribulation, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to His anger; He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence, and smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tabernacle of Ham**” (Ps 78:49-51 and cf. Psalm 105:27-36).

That there is much for us to learn from the record of these judgments cannot be doubted. That they set forth many important lessons of a practi-

cal, typical, and prophetic nature, we are fully satisfied. Their order, their arrangement, their number, their nature, their purpose, their effects, each call for careful and separate study. In this article we shall generalize; in the next we shall enter more into detail.

**1.** The *purpose* of these plagues was manifold. **First**, they gave a public manifestation of the mighty power of the Lord God (see 9:16). This, the very magicians were made to acknowledge — **“then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God’”** (8:19).

**Second**, they were a Divine visitation of wrath, a punishment of Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their cruel treatment of the Hebrews. This the haughty monarch was compelled to admit — **“Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you’”** (10:16).

**Third**, They were a judgment from God upon the gods (demons) of Egypt. This is taught in Numbers 33:4: **“For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn which the Lord had smitten among them; upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments.”**

**Fourth**, they demonstrated that Jehovah was high above all gods. This was confessed later by Jethro — **“And Jethro said, ‘Blessed be the Lord who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly He was above them’”** (Ex. 18:10).

**Fifth**, They furnished a complete testing of human responsibility. This is indicated by their *number*, for one of the leading signification of *ten*, is full responsibility — compare the *ten* Commandments, e.g.

**Sixth**, They were a solemn warning to other nations, that God would curse those who curse the Israelites (see Genesis 12:3). This was plainly realized by Rahab of Jericho — **“And she said unto the men, ‘I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when ye came out of Egypt’”** etc. (Joshua 2:8,9). It was also felt by the Philistines — **“Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness”** (1 Samuel 4:8).

**Finally**, these miraculous plagues were evidently designed as a series of testings for Israel. This is taught in Deuteronomy 4:33-34, where Moses asked Israel, **“Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by stretched out arms, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before**

**your eyes?”** (Deut. 4:33-34). The *outcome* of these testings was expressed in the following words — **“Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”** (Exodus 15:11).

2. The *arrangement* of the plagues plainly manifests Divine order and design. The tenth is separated from all the others because of its special relation to Israel and their redemption. The other nine are arranged in groups of three's. “They form three divisions, each division consisting of three plagues. That these dividing lines are drawn by the Scripture itself will be plain when we note one remarkable feature. A warning precedes, in each instance, the first and the second plagues; but with the third in each series no warning is given. Thus Moses is commanded to meet Pharaoh before the waters of Egypt are turned into blood. So again (8:1) when the frogs are to cover the land, Moses is to go in unto Pharaoh and announce what God is about to do. But when the dust is smitten and it becomes lice throughout the land of Egypt there is no command to seek Pharaoh's presence. So it is with the sixth plague, when the ashes of the furnace are used, and it becomes boils upon man and beast; and so also is it with the ninth plague, when the land was covered with darkness as with the pall of death. In none of these three cases is there any announcement to Pharaoh. It was a reminder that God would not always strive; and that warning, repeated but unheeded, will be followed by judgment sudden and terrible” [Urquhart]. Murphy in his commentary on the book of Exodus has also called attention to the fact that “in the first three plagues, Aaron uses the rod; in the second and third, it is not mentioned; in the third three, Moses uses it, though in the last of them only his hand is mentioned. All these marks of order lie on the face of the narrative, and point to a deep order of nature and reason out of which they spring.”

There is a striking *Introversion* to be observed in connection with the plagues. Thus, in the first, the waters of the Nile were turned into blood — the symbol of *death*; while in the tenth there was actual blood-shedding, in the death of all the first-born. In the second plague, the frogs which are creatures of the night, that is, *of darkness*, came forth; while in the ninth plague there was actual darkness itself. In the third plague, the magicians were forced to exclaim, **“This is the finger of God”** (8:19); while in the eighth (the balancing number according to the Introversion) Pharaoh said, **“I have sinned against the Lord your God”** (10:16). In the fourth plague we are specifically informed that God *exempted* the land of Goshen — **“no swarms of flies shall be there”** (8:22); so also in connection with the seventh plague we read, **“only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail”**. While that which was common to both the fifth and the sixth plagues was the fact that in each of them the *cattle* of the Egyptians were attacked (see 9:3 and 9:9). Thus we see again the Divine hand in the arrangement and order of these different

plagues.

3. The *progressive nature* of these plagues is easily perceived. There was a marked gradation, a steady advance in the *severity* of the Divine judgments. The first three interfered merely with the *comfort* of the Egyptians: the first, depriving them of water to drink and to wash in; the second, invading their homes with the frogs; the third, the lice attacking their persons. In the second three the Lord's hand was laid on their *possessions*; the first, the "flies" corrupting their land (8:24); the second, destroying their cattle; and the third, attacking their persons again, this time in the form of "boils" and "blains" (sores). The last three brought *desolation and death*, more plainly evidencing the direct hand of God; the hail destroyed both the herbage and the cattle; the locusts consuming what vegetation was not ruined by the hail; the darkness arresting all activity throughout the land of Egypt. All of this served to illustrate a principle which is very marked in all of the Divine dealings; as in nature, so in grace and also in judgment, there is first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear!

4. The *moral significance* of these plagues is very striking. They furnish a most solemn and complete description of the world-system (which Egypt accurately portrayed) in its dominant features. The water turned into blood tells of how death broods over this scene. The frogs, by their very inflation, suggest the pride and self-sufficiency of the children of this world. The plague of lice speaks of the uncleanness and filth which issue from the lusts of the flesh. The swarms of flies announces how that the wicked are of their father the Devil, i.e. "Beelzebub", which means "Lord of flies". The murrain (anthrax) of cattle (beasts of burden) — tells us that the service of the natural man is corrupted at its source. The boils and blains make us think of that awful description of the unregenerate given through the prophet Isaiah — **"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores"** (Isa. 1:6). The hail (accompanied by fearful lightnings which ran along the ground) symbolized that the wrath of God abideth on the disobedient. The locusts which ate up all the vegetation, pictured the spiritual barrenness of this world — a desolate waste so far as the soul is concerned. The dense darkness shows how that the world is alienated from Him who is Light. The death of all the firstborn (representative of the family) foretells that Second Death which awaits all whose hearts are hardened against God.

5. The plagues were *designed to establish the faith of the Israelites*. For four hundred years they had dwelt in a land of idolatry, where Jehovah was entirely unknown. Moreover, the priests of Egypt were able to perform deeds which could not be explained apart from supernatural agency. The Lord therefore was pleased to so manifest Himself now that all impartial observers (whose minds were not blinded by Satan) must recognize

the existence and omnipotence of the true God, in contradistinction from the impotency of the false gods of their heathen neighbors. In the plagues, the presence and power of Jehovah were demonstrated, so that He stood discovered to His people as the Living God. This comes out the more clearly when it is recognized that these displays of the Lord's power were so many judgments directed against the false confidences and idolatrous objects of the Egyptians (see 12:12). The sign which authenticated the mission of Moses to Pharaoh furnished more than a hint — the “serpent” was an object of worship among the Egyptians, and when Aaron's serpent transformed rod swallowed those of the magicians, a plain warning was given that their god would be unable to save them from the forthcoming storm.

Others have described in detail the particular “gods” against which the different plagues were directed, so that it is unnecessary for us to say more than a few words upon this phase of our subject. The first plague smote the Nile, an object regarded with profound veneration by the Egyptians. Its waters were held as sacred as is the Ganges by the Hindoos. A fearful blow then was it to their system of worship when its waters were turned to blood and its dead fish made to stink. In the second plague, the Nile was made to send forth myriads of frogs, which invaded the homes of the Egyptians and became a nuisance and torment to the people. In the third plague, lice were sent upon man and beast, and, “if it be remembered”, says Gleig, “that no one could approach the altars of Egypt upon which so impure an Insect harbored; and, that the priests to guard against the slightest risk of contamination, wore only linen garments, and shaved their heads and bodies every third day, the severity of this miracle as a judgment upon Egyptian idolatry may be imagined. Whilst it lasted no act of worship could be performed, and so keenly was this felt that the very magicians explained, **‘this is the finger of God’**”.

The fourth plague was designed “to destroy the trust of the people in Beelzebub, or the Fly-god, who was revered as their protector from visitation of swarms of ravenous flies, which infested the land generally about the time of the dog-days, and removed only as they supposed at the will of their idol. The miracle now wrought by Moses evinced the impotence of Beelzebub and caused the people to look elsewhere for relief from the fearful visitation under which they were suffering. The fifth plague, which consumed all the cattle, excepting those of the Israelites, was aimed at the destruction of the entire system of brute worship. This system, degrading and bestial as it was, had become a monster of many heads in Egypt. They had their sacred bull, and ram, and heifer, and goat, and many others, all of which were destroyed by the agency of the God of Moses, thus, by one act of power, Jehovah manifested His own supremacy and destroyed the very existence of their brute idols” (Dr J. B. Walker). And so we might continue.

6. The *conduct of the magicians* in connection with the plagues is deserving of notice. It has already been intimated in a previous article that we have no patience with those who would reduce the miracles wrought by these men to mere slight-of-hand-deceptions. Not only is there no hint whatever in the sacred narrative of any deception practiced by them, not only does the inspired account describe what they wrought in precisely the same terms as it refers to the wonders performed by Moses and Aaron, but there are other insuperable objections against the conjuring theory. It is therefore deeply distressing to find men whose names command respect, pandering to that rationalism which seeks to deny everything supernatural. Have such men forgotten those words in Revelation 16:14 — **“they are the spirits of demons working miracles”!**

If Jehovah was to make a public display of Himself before the Egyptians and the Israelites, it was necessary (in the fitness of things) that He should suffer the sorcerers of Egypt to enter into conflict against Himself. The magicians, appearing in the name of their gods, were completely routed, for not only was it evidenced that the power of God working through Moses was superior to their sorceries, but it was also shown that He was hostile to them and their idolatrous worship. Three times were the magicians allowed to display their powers — in the changing of their rods to serpents (7:12) in turning water into blood (7:22), and in bringing forth frogs (8:12). Beyond this they did not go. The three things which they *did* do were very significant; the first spoke of Satanic power, the second of death, and the third of pride and uncleanness. Concerning the fourth plague, we are told, **“and the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not”** (8:18). Here is further proof that the wonders wrought by the magicians were no mere feats of legerdemain. If they were really exhibiting slight-of-hand tricks it would have been far simpler to substitute lice for dust, than it would be to substitute serpents for rods! The fact that they *could not* duplicate the miracle of the lice is proof positive that something more than a conjuring performance is in view here.

If we bear in mind that these earlier chapters of Exodus bring before us a symbolic tableau of the great conflict between good and evil, we shall easily perceive the reason why the Lord permitted Pharaoh’s sorcerers to work these miracles. They serve to illustrate the activities of Satan, and this, not only as describing the character of his works, but also, as exposing both the methods he pursues and the limits of his success. The Devil is ever an *imitator*, as the parable of the tares following that of the wheat (Matthew 13) plainly shows. The aim of Pharaoh was to *nullify* the miracles of Moses. The Lord’s servant had performed miracles — very well, the king would summon his magicians and show that they could do likewise. This exemplifies an unchanging principle in the workings of Satan. First, he seeks to oppose with force (persecution, etc.), as he had the He-

brews by means of their slavery. When he is foiled here he resorts to subtler methods, and employs his wiles to deceive. The one is the roaring of the “**lion**” (1 Peter 5:8); the other the cunning of the “**serpent**” (Genesis 3:1).

There is a striking verse in the New Testament which throws light on the subject before us. In 2 Timothy 3:8, we read, “**Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.**” Here we learn the names of two of the magicians (doubtless the principal ones) who worked miracles in Egypt. Jannes and Jambres *withstood* Moses. They did this not by having him turned out of the king’s palace, not by causing him to be imprisoned or slain, but by duplicating his works. And, says the Holy Spirit, there are those now who similarly resist the servants of *God* — “**as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these**” (the ones mentioned in vv. 5 and 6) “**also resist the truth.**” This is one of the Divinely-delineated characteristics of the “perilous times”. The reference is to men (and women) supernaturally endowed by Satan to work miracles. Such are found to-day, we believe, not only among Spiritualists and Christian Scientists, but also in some of the leaders of the Faith-healing cults. There are men and women now posing as evangelists of Christ who are attracting large crowds numbered by the thousand. Their chief appeal is not the message they bear, but their readiness to “anoint” and pray over the sick. They claim that “Jesus” (they never own Him as “the Lord Jesus”), in response to their faith, has through them removed paralysis, healed cancers, given sight to the blind. When their claims are carefully investigated it is found that most of the widely-advertised “cures” are impostures. But on the other hand, there *are* some cases which are genuine healings, and which cannot be explained apart from supernatural agency. So it was with the miracles wrought by the magicians of Pharaoh; though limited by God they *did* perform prodigies.

7. These plagues furnished a most striking *prophetic forecast* of God’s future judgments upon the world. This is to us, one of the most remarkable things connected with God’s judgments upon Egypt. The analogies furnished between those visitations of Divine wrath of old and those which the Scriptures predict, and announce for the future, are many and most minute. We here call attention only to a few of the more striking ones; the diligent student may discover many more for himself if he will take the necessary trouble: —

During the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, Israel shall again be sorely oppressed and afflicted (Isaiah 60:14 and Jeremiah 30:5-8).

They will cry unto God, and He will hear and answer (Jeremiah 31:58-20).

God will command their oppressors to, Let them go (Isaiah 43:6).

God will send two witnesses to work miracles before their enemies

(Revelation 11:3-6).

Their enemies will also perform miracles (Revelation 13:13-15)

God will execute sore judgments upon the world (Jeremiah 25:15, 16).

God will protect His own people from them (Revelation 7:4; 12:6,14-16).

Water will again be turned into blood (Revelation 8:8; 16:4,5).

Satanic frogs will appear (Revelation 16:53).

A plague of locusts shall be sent (Revelation 9:2-11).

God will send boils and blains (Revelation 16:2).

Terrible hail-stones shall descend from heaven (Revelation 8:7).

There shall be awful darkness (Isaiah 60:2; Revelation 16:10).

Just as Pharaoh hardened his heart so will the wicked in the day to come (Revelation 9:20,21).

Death will consume multitudes (Revelation 9:15).

Israel will be delivered (Zechariah 14:3, 4; Romans 11:26).

Thus will history repeat itself, and then will it be fully demonstrated that the plagues of Jehovah upon Egypt of old portended the yet more awful judgments by which the earth shall be visited in a day now very near at hand.

#### **Seven Vials Hold Thy Wrath**

Seven vials hold Thy wrath: but what can hold  
 Thy mercy save Thine own Infinitude,  
 Boundlessly overflowing with all good,  
 All lovingkindness all delights untold?  
 Thy Love, of each created love the mould;  
 Thyself, of all the empty plenitude;  
 Heard of as Ephrata, found in the Wood,  
 For ever One, the Same, and Manifold.  
 Lord, give us grace to tremble with that dove  
 Which Ark-bound winged its solitary way  
 And overpast the Deluge in a day,  
 Whom Noah's hand pulled in and comforted:  
 For we who much more hang upon Thy Love  
 Behold its shadow in the deed he did.

-- Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)



## A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction

### A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

#### The Prosperity and Triumphs of Enemies of the Church

Another great trial of our patience is the triumph of the wicked enemies of the church, and that the saints are usually under their feet in sufferings and scorn. I spake before of persecution, and as to the prosperity and triumphs of malignants. David, who was under the like temptation, hath long ago given us considerations sufficient for our patience (see Ps. 37 and 73). And the triumph of the wicked is but for a moment, and their motion as the grasshoppers, that fall as they rise. Their victories, and glory, and rage, are like a squib of gunpowder, which makes a noise and is presently extinct: they are moved dust, which the wind of God's displeasure blows into our eyes: they are dying while they are raging, and their own death is at hand and lingereth not, while they are killing others. Go into the sanctuary and see their end, and it may silence all impatience; for see their corpses in rottenness, and their souls in hell, and pity will overcome envy, and their case will appear to you a thousand times sadder than theirs that suffer by them for righteousness' sake. Their contrivances do but plot themselves into misery. All the blood which they shed, must be reckoned for: and precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, even when they seem deserted. Where now is Alexander, Caesar, Tamerlane, and such other famous murderers called conquerors? Are they now triumphing? Is it an ease to their tormented souls, or life to their dust, that living fools do magnify their names, and their dear-bought victories and murders? If it be no glory to a serpent, crocodile, or a wolf, or a mad dog, to kill men, no nor to the devil, who is a murderer from the beginning, why should it be a glory to these instruments of the devil? Oh what a dreadful search will it be to Babylon, when in her shall be found the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus, and upon her shall come at once all the righteous blood that hath been shed! The blood of the many hundred thousand Waldenses, Albigenses, Bohemians, etc., did but render the enemies more odious: their inquisition, and Alva's cruelties, lost them

the Low Countries. They got nothing in France by the sudden murder of thirty or forty thousand protestants; nor will they get at last by their present cruelties. The two hundred thousand murdered by the Irish, prepared for the murderers' greater ruin, but did not satisfy their desires. Queen Mary's fires did but make her allies the more easily and commonly hated and extirpated in the days of her successor. Persecutors are not immortal, but must die as well as others: and they have not always the choice of their successors. And as their names rot with their carcasses, and to pious, sober, and wise posterity no names are more odious, so their designs and works also often perish with them. We have seen in our days and land, the same men that were the terror of the nation in war, laid in a grave and left to the common earth, where no one is afraid of them. And the same men that were lift up by many victories, thought kings, parliament, ministers, and people must submit to their will, as being in their power, within one or two years were hanged, drawn, and quartered, and their quarters hung up over the gates of the city; their victorious army being dissolved without one drop of bloodshed.

If we saw a drunken man or a mad-man raging in the streets, so that people were afraid to come near him, who would think such a man therefore ever the more happy? Or who would desire to be in his case? If we judge of them by that part they are now acting on the stage, under great names and garbs, we shall be deluded as they are. Look on them undressed, and off the stage, see what they are under the pangs of death, or when the soul is dragged away to punishment, and hath left their ghastly faces and carcasses for the grave. See what God saith of them in His word, and believe His prognostic what shall befall them. Is Ahab ever the better for being recorded in Scripture, as an enemy to faithful prophets? Or Cain ever the better for being the first murderer in the world? Or Herod ever the better for being mentioned in the gospel? Or Pilate, for having his name in the creed? Or are the flames ever the easier to Dives, because he once fared sumptuously, and was clothed richly every day, while Lazarus lay at his gate in sores? The time is short; the conqueror and the conquered will be equal in the dust, where they will cease to trouble, and lie in peace; but the persecutor and the persecuted (for righteousness' sake) will be as distantly separated as hell from heaven. The men of this world, who have their portion in this life, are God's sword and rod to correct His children; but as they now glory in their shame, so they shall shortly be ashamed of their glorying, and wish in vain that all their proud oppressions and cruel victories had been not done, or could be undone.

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## New Testament Study: Matthew 18:1-9

### “Who is the Greatest?”

<sup>1</sup>At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

<sup>2</sup>He called a little child and had him stand among them. <sup>3</sup>And He said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup>“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me. <sup>6</sup>But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

<sup>7</sup>“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! <sup>8</sup>If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. <sup>9</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

In recent sections, Jesus has been speaking frequently of His upcoming humiliation at the hands of His enemies. Jesus never preached self-advancement or self-aggrandizement. He always and ever preached (and indeed lived) humility. “As there never was a greater pattern of humility, so there never was a greater preacher of it, than Christ; He took all occasions to command it, to commend it, to His disciples and followers” [Henry]. It is surprising then that the disciples would even dare broach this question: “**At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’**” (vs. 1). “The

very fact that they asked that question showed that they had no idea at all what the Kingdom of Heaven was" [Barclay, in Morris, 458]. We learn in Mark and Luke that the disciples were arguing about who of *them* was the greatest (see Mark 9:33ff; Luke 9:46ff). One could only imagine the argument that they had. "They strive who it should be, each having some pretence or other to it. Peter was always the chief speaker, and already had the keys given him; he expects to be lord-chancellor, or lord-chamberlain of the household, and so to be the greatest. Judas had the bag, and therefore he expects to be lord-treasurer, which, though now he come last, he hopes, will then denominate him the greatest. Simon and Jude are nearly related to Christ, and they hope to take place of all the great officers of state, as princes of the blood. John is the beloved disciple, the favorite of the Prince, and therefore hopes to be the greatest. Andrew was first called, and why should not he be first preferred?" [Henry]. And all this took place in light of Jesus' very recent teaching to them: **"If any-one would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"** (Matt. 16:24). "Many love to hear and speak of privileges and glory, who are willing to pass by the thoughts of work and trouble. They look so much at the crown, that they forget the yoke and the cross" [Henry]. "They seem to have become increasingly sure that Jesus was the Messiah, which meant that the messianic kingdom was just around the corner, and that in turn meant for them that the top places in the kingdom were up for grabs" [Morris, 458].

Jesus, no doubt, surprised them with His answer: **"He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'"** (vss. 2-4). Ironically, the disciples, in their arguments about who was the greatest, were acting like schoolyard children; it is not that sort of child-like behavior about which Jesus was speaking. Rather, it is the humility displayed by a little child placed in the midst of grown men. Notice that Jesus called **"a little child and had him stand among them"** (vs. 2). The large, bearded, swaggering men must certainly have intimidated the little child to a state of humility before them. "Surrounded by grown men, the child must have looked insignificant, which of course is Jesus' point" [Morris, 458]. "The kingdom of heaven is not like earthly kingdoms. In earthly kingdoms military might or earthly wealth is what counts. It is the ability to overthrow others or to outsmart them or to outbid them that matters. The person who asserts himself is the one who gets on. But Jesus' kingdom is quite different. Paradoxically, it is the person who is like the little child who is the greatest. Being in the king-

dom does not mean entering a competition for the supreme place, but engaging in lowly service" [Morris, 460].

With the child still among the disciples, as a prop, Jesus continues His teaching: **"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea"** (vss. 5-6). The child here is representing the humble believer. Jesus tells us that the way we treat a believer, He will consider us to be treating Jesus in the same way. If we **"welcome"** the believer into our homes, Jesus will consider that we are **"welcoming"** Him into our homes. Conversely, there will be serious consequences for us if we cause the believer to stumble into sin. Evil people in this world love to see Christians stumble into sin. They love to have the opportunity to trot out the saying, "See! All Christians are hypocrites!" "Wicked men often think it great sport to induce a Christian to sin, especially one who seems very meek and gentle. If they can make him violently angry, or lead him into excessive levity, to say nothing of gross vices, they are prodigiously amused and gratified. Such persons ought to remember these solemn and awful words of the compassionate Savior" [Broadus, 384].

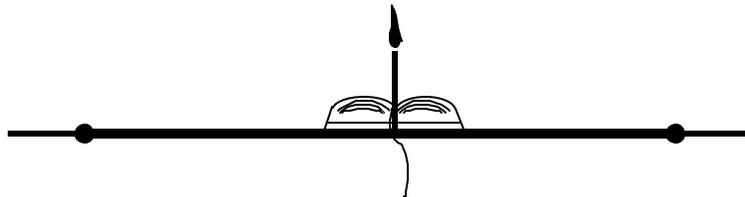
Jesus continues: **"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"** (vs. 7). God hates sin: make no mistake about this. Sadly, though, because of the state of fallen man, **"such things must come."** However, just because sin is inevitable, this does not lessen the punishment for sinners: **"...but woe to the man through whom they come."** "The world being what it is and people being what they are, it is inevitable that **'the things that cause people to sin'** will make their appearance. But that they are certain to come does not excuse the person who brings them about" [Morris, 462].

Jesus goes on with some teaching concerning the seriousness of sin: **"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell"** (vss. 8-9). Jesus repeats some of the teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:29). "Those hard sayings of Christ, which are displeasing to flesh and blood, need to be repeated to us again and again" [Henry]. This teaching of Jesus is shocking, and is, of course, meant to be shocking. Jesus is teaching us the seriousness of sin. "He is using picturesque language to make clear that He looks for a com-

plete and thorough repudiation of evil" [Morris, 463]. None of us would ever want to cut a hand off, or gouge out an eye. Yet, we waltz lightly, willingly, knowingly into sin, day after day. Jesus is teaching us that we must make extraordinary effort to get rid of the cause of sin. "What it is that is here enjoined: We must part with an eye, or a hand or a foot, that is, that, whatever it is, which is dear to us, when it proves unavoidably an occasion of sin to us" [Henry]. Now, there are no examples in the Bible of people cutting off limbs to get rid of the source of sin, but there are examples of people making extraordinary efforts to be rid of the cause of sin. "When Abraham quitted his native country, for fear of being ensnared in the idolatry of it, and when Moses quitted Pharaoh's court, for fear of being entangled in the sinful pleasures of it, there was [figuratively speaking] a right hand cut off. We must think nothing too dear to part with, for the keeping of a good conscience" [Henry].

Note in these last few verses, Jesus alludes to judgment for sinners after death. He implies that judgment is worse than having "**a large millstone hung around one's neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea**" (vs. 6). He speaks of "**eternal fire**" (vs. 8), and "**the fire of hell**" (vs. 9). Jesus, being the Son of God, would know about eternal judgment, for judgment comes from God. "Jesus leaves His hearers in no doubt as to the seriousness of the eternal state of sinners" [Morris, 463]. We often here teaching that waters down eternal punishment. Some say, "God would never do that!" But, who are you, O man, to say what God would or would not do. Again, Jesus, who knows about such things, speaks of eternal punishment for the unsaved. "Let no man deceive us with vain words upon this awful subject. Men have arisen in these latter days who profess to deny the eternity of future punishment and repeat the devil's old argument, that we '**shall not surely die**' (Gen. 3:4). Let none of their reasonings stand fast in the old paths. The God of love and mercy is also a God of justice: He will surely requite" [Ryle, 222].

The good news is that, sinner though we are, we can avoid eternal punishment. Jesus has paid the price for our sins, if we would accept this great gift of His. God truly is love. He is the God of grace and forgiveness, through His Son Jesus Christ. May the Lord be praised!





## A Topical Study: Self-Examination

### The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 9 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24, AV).

*(This study is continued from last month's issue.)*

#### Section 8 (cont.)

*Self-examination respecting the families to which we belong.*

[2.] I shall apply myself to parents and heads of families. Inquire whether you do not live in some way of sin with respect to your children, or others committed to your care: and particularly inquire,

1. Whether you do not live in sin, by living in the neglect of instructing them. Do you not wholly neglect the duty of instructing your children and servants! Or if you do not wholly neglect it, yet do you not afford them so little instruction, and are you not so unsteady, and do you not take so little pains in it, that you live in a sinful neglect? Do you take pains in any measure proportionate to the importance of the matter? You cannot but own that it is a matter of vast importance, that your children be fitted for death, and saved from hell; and that all possible care be taken that it be done speedily; for you know not how soon your children may die. Are you as careful about the welfare of their souls as you are of their bodies? Do you labour as much that they may have eternal life, as you do to provide estates for them to live on in this world?

Let every parent inquire, whether he do not live in a way of sin in this respect: and let masters inquire, whether they do not live in a way of sin, in neglecting the poor souls of their servants; whether their only care be not to make their servants subservient to their worldly interest, without any concern what becomes of them to all eternity.

2. Do you not live in a sinful neglect of the government of your families? Do you not live in the sin of Eli; who indeed counseled and reproved his children, but did not exercise government over them? He reproved them very solemnly, as 1 Samuel 2:23, 24, 25. But he did not restrain them, by which he greatly provoked God, and brought an everlasting curse upon his house: **"In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. I will judge his house for ever; because his sons made them-**

**selves vile, and he restrained them not.**" (1 Sam. 3:12, AV). If you say you cannot restrain your children, this is no excuse, for it is a sign that you have brought up your children without government, that your children regard not your authority. When parents lose their government over their children, their reproofs and counsel signify but little. How many parents are there who are exceedingly faulty on this account! How few are there who are thorough in maintaining order and government in their families! How is family-government in a great measure vanished! And how many are as likely to bring a curse upon their families, as Eli! This is one principal ground of the corruptions which prevail in the land. This is the foundation of so much debauchery, and of such corrupt practices among young people: family-government is in a great measure extinct. By neglect in this particular, parents bring the guilt of their children's sins upon their own souls, and the blood of their children will be required at their hands.

Parents sometimes weaken one another's hands in this work; one parent disapproving what the other doth; one smiling upon a child, while the other frowns, one protecting, while the other corrects. When things in a family are thus, children are like to be undone. Therefore let every one examine whether he do not live in some way of sin with respect to this matter.

**[3.]** I shall now apply myself to children. Let them examine themselves, whether they do not live in some way of sin towards their parents. Are you not guilty of some undutifulness towards them, in which you allow yourselves? Are you not guilty of despising your parents for infirmities which you see in them? Undutiful children are ready to condemn their parents for their infirmities. Are not you sons of Ham, who saw and made derision of his father's nakedness, whereby he entailed a curse on himself and his posterity to this day, and not the sons of Shem and Japheth, who covered the nakedness of their father? Are you not guilty of dishonouring and despising your parents for natural infirmities, or those of old age? **"Despise not thy mother when she is old"** (Proverbs 23:22). Doth not that curse belong to you, in Deuteronomy 27:16: **"Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother?"** Are you not wont to despise the counsels and reproofs of our parents? When they warn you against any sin, and reprove you for any misconduct, are you not wont to set light by it, and to be impatient under it? Do you honour your parents for it? On the contrary, do you not receive it with resentment proudly rejecting it? Doth it not stir up corruption, and a stubborn and perverse spirit in you, and rather make you to have an ill will to your parents, than to love and honour them? Are you not to be reckoned among the fools mentioned Proverbs 15:5: **"A fool despiseth his father's instruction?"** And doth not that curse belong to you, Proverbs 30:17: **"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it?"**

Do you not allow a fretful disposition towards your parents, when they cross you in anything? Are you not apt to find fault with your parents, and to be out of temper with them?

Consider, that if you live in such ways as these, you not only live in sin, but in that sin than which there is scarcely any one oftener threatened with a curse in the word of God.



## A Study in Psalms: Psalm 66 (pt. 1)

### Psalm 66 (pt. 1) - “Shout with Joy to God, All the Earth”

For the director of music.  
A song. A psalm.

<sup>1</sup>Shout with joy to God, all the earth!

<sup>2</sup>Sing the glory of His name;  
make His praise glorious!

<sup>3</sup>Say to God,

“How awesome are Your deeds!

So great is Your power  
that Your enemies cringe before You.

<sup>4</sup>All the earth bows down to You;  
they sing praise to You,  
they sing praise to Your name.” *Selah*

<sup>5</sup>Come and see what God has done,  
how awesome His works in man’s behalf!

<sup>6</sup>He turned the sea into dry land,  
they passed through the waters on foot—  
Come, let us rejoice in Him.

<sup>7</sup>He rules forever by His power,  
His eyes watch the nations—  
Let not the rebellious rise up against Him. *Selah*

<sup>8</sup>Praise our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of His praise be heard;

<sup>9</sup>He has preserved our lives  
and kept our feet from slipping.

<sup>10</sup>For You, O God, tested us;  
You refined us like silver.

<sup>11</sup>You brought us into prison  
and laid burdens on our backs.

<sup>12</sup>You let men ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and water,  
but You brought us to a place of abundance.

<sup>13</sup>I will come to Your temple with burnt offerings  
and fulfill my vows to You—

<sup>14</sup>Vows my lips promised  
and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.

<sup>15</sup>I will sacrifice fat animals to You  
and an offering of rams;

I will offer bulls and goats. *Selah*

<sup>16</sup>Come and listen, all You who fear God;  
let me tell You what he has done for me.

<sup>17</sup>I cried out to Him with my mouth;  
His praise was on my tongue.

<sup>18</sup>If I had cherished sin in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened;

<sup>19</sup>But God has surely listened  
and heard my voice in prayer.

<sup>20</sup>Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer  
or withheld His love from me!

This is a psalm of praise to God. The Psalmist, in the course of the psalm, goes from the macro to the micro: he first speaks of praise due God from all the earth (vss. 1-7); then he speaks of praise due God from the Church, God's people (vss. 8-12); and finally, he speaks of praise due God by the Psalmist himself (vss. 13-20). Indeed, praise is due God universally: from all levels of society; from all aggregations of peoples; from all nations and cultures; from the meek to the powerful; from the rich to the poor.

As the Psalmist begins: **“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious!”** (vss. 1-2). Praise is required by all. It is, one could say, an implicit law arising from the Creation. Since God created the Universe, all its inhabitants should praise Him. “This speaks the glory of God, that He is worthy to be praised by all, for He is good to all and furnishes every nation with matter for praise” [Henry].

Note that our praise to God should be vocal, even loud. We are directed to **“Shout with joy to God.”** “If praise is to be widespread, it must be vocal; exulting sounds stir the soul and cause a sacred contagion of thanksgiving” [Spurgeon]. Those who think the praise of God must be carried out in whispered tones, in solemn, quiet buildings must find this and many others psalms strange.

Note also that our praise to God should not be a chore, but should be entered into gladly. We should **“Shout with joy to God.”** “Holy joy is that devout affection which should animate all our praises” [Henry].

The goal of our praise should be to glorify God. Thus, we should **“Sing the glory of His name.”** Our goal should be to **“make His praise glorious.”**

The psalmist suggests some words of praise due God from the nations of the earth: **“Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your deeds! So great in Your power that Your enemies cringe before You. All the earth bows down to You; they sing praise to You, they sing praise to Your name’”** (vss. 3-4). This is somewhat of a prophetic passage by the Psalmist. He is looking forward to the time when the whole world, all nations, will be awed by the power of God, and sing their praises to Him. The Psalmist began the psalm by exhorting **“all the earth”** to praise God (see vs. 1). In verse 4, he looks forward to the fulfillment of that exhortation. **“All men must even now prostrate themselves before Thee, but a time will come when they shall do this cheerfully; to the worship of fear shall be added the singing of love. What a change shall have taken place when singing shall displace sighing, and music shall thrust out misery”** [Spurgeon].

Reasons to praise God are manifest and obvious throughout Creation. Thus, the Psalmist exhorts: **“Come and see what God has done, how awesome His works in man’s behalf!”** (vs. 5). **“The reason why we do not praise him more and better is because we do not duly and attentively observe what God has done”** [Henry]. Specifically, the Psalmist cites the miraculous intervention God made on His people’s behalf at the parting of the Red Sea: **“He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—Come, let us rejoice in Him”** (vs. 6). **“Whatsoever the Lord hath done for His people in any time bypassed, He is able and ready to do the like for His people in any time to come, and for this cause His former acts are perpetual evidences and pledges of like acts to be done hereafter, as need is”** [Dickson, 388].

As God was in complete control in times past, so He will always be in complete control: **“He rules forever by His power, His eyes watch the nations—Let not the rebellious rise up against Him”** (vs. 7). God is intimately concerned with what goes on in the world. **“His eyes watch the nations”**, and so, all world leaders should look to God for guidance, and strive to lead their nations in the way of godliness.

Having exhorted the nations of the world to praise God, the Psalmist now turns specifically to the people of God, and exhorts them to praise God: **“Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of His praise be heard”** (vs. 8). The Psalmist gives a reason for God’s people to praise Him: **“He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping”** (vs. 9). We live because God chooses to **“preserve our lives”**: every breath of air, every heartbeat is under His control.

The Psalmist also points out that God **“kept our feet from slipping”** (vs. 9). This is significant, because God’s people have endured much hardship over the years. But yet, the hardships themselves have come from God’s hand: **“For You, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver”** (vs. 10). Just as silver is brought through the refiner’s fire in

order to remove impurities, so also we are brought through trials to test and purify us. The presence of affliction and hardship in one's life is not a sign of being forsaken by God. On the contrary, it is a sign that you are one of God's children. **"Endure hardship as discipline, God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?"** (Heb. 12:7). "All the saints must go to the proving house; God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without trial. Why ought we to complain if we are subjected to the rule which is common to all the family, and from which so much benefit has flowed to them?" [Spurgeon]. "When visited with affliction it is of great importance that we should consider it as coming from God, and as expressly intended for our good" [Barnes]. "The whole of life is a test, a trial of what is in us, so arranged by God Himself, and it is of great importance that we so regard it" [Plumer, 654].

The Psalmist speaks specifically of the hardships the people of God had endured: **"You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance"** (vss. 11-12). Note, even when speaking of the afflictions, the Psalmist says, **"You brought us..."** "We are never in the net but God brings us into it, never under affliction but God lays it upon us" [Henry]. Ironically, this should give us comfort that it is our loving God who brings us into affliction. It reinforces that God is in control, even during hard times. And since our God is a loving God, we know that the ultimate result of the affliction will be for our good. As we are going through afflictions, it is difficult for us to see the good that will result from them. But when our hardships have passed, we can look back and see the good that have come from them, just as the Psalmist can look back at the slavery of God's people in Egypt, and see the good that resulted: **"We went through fire and water, but You brought us to a place of abundance"** (vs. 12). The people of God entered Egypt a rag-tag, quarreling set of brothers. They left Egypt as the united children of God. The suffering they experienced forged a bond between them that continues to exist today. Then, the ultimate result was that they were **"brought to place of abundance"**: they entered the promised land. We will all experience a similar trial, as we pass from this life into the next. That transition, the death of our bodies, does not take place without pain. For some, this trial will come in the form of a protracted illness. For others, it will come at the hand of an enemy in the defense of one's country. Some will experience an unexpected and (they would say) untimely death. Others will almost welcome death, as they grow weary of this world. But for all of us, for all the children of God, our death will occur with God's sanction, with Him at our side, and at His timing. And then, after death, we will truly be **"brought to a place of abundance"**, as we enter into an eternity in His presence, where Jesus **"will lead us to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes"** (see Rev. 7:17).

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**The Frailty of Life  
Requires Preparation  
for Death**

"A creature treading every moment upon the slippery brink of the grave, and ready every moment to shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away to some unknown coast, ought to stand always in the posture of serious expectation; ought every day to be in his own mind taking leave of this world, breaking off the connections of his heart from it, and preparing for his last remove into that world in which he must reside, not for a few months or years as in this, but through a boundless everlasting duration. Such a situation requires habitual, constant thoughtfulness, abstraction from the world, and serious preparation for death and eternity."

-- Samuel Davies (1724-1761)

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