

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord..." Isaiah 1:18

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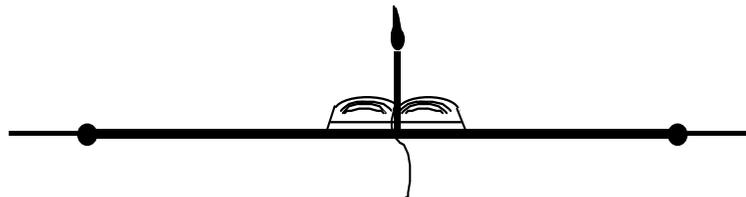
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Old Testament Study: Exodus 15:24-27

In the Wilderness, pt. 2
by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

²⁴And the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, ²⁶And said, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee." ²⁷And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

"And the people *murmured* against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" (v. 24). Very solemn is this. Three days ago this people had been singing, now they are murmuring. Praising before the Red Sea gives place to complaining at Marah! A real trial was this experience, but how sadly Israel failed under it. Just as before, when they saw the Egyptians bearing down upon them at Pihahiroth, so now once more they upbraid Moses for bringing them into trouble. They appeared to have overlooked entirely the fact that they had been *led* to Marah by the Pillar of Cloud (13:22)! Their murmuring against Moses was, in reality, murmuring against the Lord. And so it is with us. Every complaint against our circumstances, every grumble about the weather, about the way people treat us, about the daily trials of life, is directed *against* that One Who "**worketh all things after the counsel of His Own will**" (Ephesians 1:11). Remember, dear reader, that what is here recorded of Israel's history is "**written for our admonition**" (1 Corinthians 10:11). There is the same evil heart of unbelief and the same rebellious will within us as were in the Israelites. Therefore do we need to earnestly seek grace that the one may be subdued and the other broken.

And what was the *cause* of their "**murmuring**"? There can be only one answer: their eye was no longer upon God. After the wonders of Jehovah's power which they had witnessed in Egypt, and their glorious deliverance at the Red Sea, it ought to have been unmistakably evident to them that *He*

was *for and with* them in very truth. But so far from recognizing this, they do not seem to have given *Him* a single thought. They speak as if they had to do with Moses only. And is it not frequently so with us? When we reach Marah, do we not charge some fellow-creature with being responsible for *our* hard lot? Some friend in whom we trusted, some counsellor whose advice we respected, some arm of flesh on which we leaned has failed us, and we *blame them* because of the “bitter waters!”

“**And he cried unto the Lord**” (v. 25). Moses did what Israel ought to have done — he took the matter to God in prayer. This is what our “**Marah’s**” are for — to drive us to the Lord. I say “*drive*,” for the tragic thing is that most of the time we are so under the influence of the flesh that we become absorbed with His blessings, rather than with the Blessor Himself. Not, perhaps, that we are entirely prayer-less, but rather that there is so little *heart* in our prayers. It is sad and solemn, yet nevertheless true, that it takes a “**Marah**” to make us cry unto God *in earnest*. “**They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them. THEN they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.... Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help. THEN they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.... Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they drew near unto the gates of death, THEN they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saveth them out of their distresses... They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. THEN they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses**” (Psalm 107:4, 5, 12, 13, 18, 19, 27, 28). Alas that this is so often true of writer and reader.

“**And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet**” (v. 25). Moses did not cry unto God in vain. The One who has provided redemption for His people is the God of all grace, and with infinite longsufferance does He bear with them. The faith of Israel might fail, and instead of trusting the Lord for the supply of their need, give way to murmuring; nevertheless, He came to their relief. So with us. How true it is that “**He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities**” (Psalm 103:10). But *on what ground* does the thrice Holy One deal so tenderly with His erring people? Ah, is it not beautiful to see that at this point, too, our type is perfect — it was in response to the cries of an *interceding mediator* that God acted. In His official character Moses is seen all through as the one who came between God and Israel. It was in response to *his* cry that the Lord came to Israel’s relief! And blessed be God there is also One who “**ever liveth to make intercession for us**” (Hebrews 7:25), and on *this* ground God deals tenderly with us as we pass through the wilderness: “**If any man sin we have**

an *Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous*" (1 John 2:1).

The form which God's response took on this occasion is also deeply significant and instructive. He showed Moses "a tree." The "tree" had evidently been there all the time, but Moses *saw* it not, or at least knew not its sweetening properties. It was not until the Lord "*showed him*" the tree that he learned of the provision of God's grace. This shows how *dependent* we are upon the Lord, and how blind we are in ourselves. Of Hagar we read, "**And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water**" (Genesis 21:19). So in 2 Kings 6:17 we are told, "**And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.**" Clearly "**the hearing ear, and seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them**" (Proverbs 20:12).

And *what* was it that the Lord "**showed**" Moses? It was "a tree." And what did this "**tree**" which sweetened the bitter waters, typify? Surely it is the person and work of our Blessed Savior — the two are inseparably connected. There are several Scriptures which present Him under the figure of a "**tree**." In the 1st Psalm it is said, "**He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His season, His leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever He doeth shall prosper**" (v. 3). Again, in Song of Solomon 2:3 we read, "*As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste.*" Here is the second great lesson of our wilderness-life — nothing can sweeten the bitter cup of our earthly experiences except reposing under the shadow of Christ. Sit down at *His* feet, dear reader, and *you* shall find His fruit "**sweet**" unto your taste, and His words sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb.

But the "**tree**" also speaks of the *cross* of Christ: "**Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the Tree**" (1 Peter 2:24), "The cross of Christ is that which makes what is naturally bitter sweet to us. It is '*the fellowship of His sufferings*' (Philippians 3:10), and the knowledge of its being that, what suffering can it not sweeten!.... Let us remember here that these sufferings of which we speak are therefore sufferings which are peculiar to us *as Christians*. This '**bitterness**' of death in the wilderness is not simply the experience of what falls to the common lot of man to experience. It is not the bitterness simply of being in the body — of enduring the ills which, they say, flesh is heir to. It is the bitterness which results from being linked with Christ in His own path of suffering here. '**If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him**' (II Tim. 2:12). Marah then is sweetened by this '**tree**'; the cross, the cross of shame; the cross which was the mark of the world's verdict as to Him — the cross it is that sweetens the struggles. If we endure shame and rejection for Him, as His, we can endure it, and the sweet reality of being linked with Him makes Marah itself drinkable" (Mr. Grant). A beautiful illustration is furnished in

Acts 16. There we see Paul and Silas in the prison of Philippi; they were cruelly scourged, and then thrown into the innermost dungeon. Behold them in the darkness, feet fast in the stocks, and backs bleeding. That was “*Marab*” for them indeed. But how were they employed? They “*sang praises,*” and sang so lustily that the other prisoners heard them (Acts 16:25). There we see the “*tree*” sweetening the bitter waters. How was it possible for them to sing under such circumstances? Because they rejoiced that they were “**counted worthy to suffer shame for ‘His name’**” (Acts 5:41)! This, then, is *how we are to use* the Cross in our daily lives — to regard our Christian trials and afflictions as opportunities for having fellowship with the sufferings of the Savior.

“**There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them and said, ‘If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians’**” (vv. 25, 26). It is very important to mark the context here. Nothing had been said to Israel about Jehovah’s “**statutes and commandments**” while they were in Egypt. But now that they were redeemed, now that they had been purchased for Himself, God’s governmental claims are pressed upon them. The Lord was dealing with them in wondrous grace. But grace is not lawlessness. Grace only makes us the more indebted to God. Our obligations are increased, not cancelled thereby. Grace reigns “**through righteousness,**” not at the expense of it (see Romans 5:21). The obligation of obedience can never be liquidated so long as God is God. Grace only establishes *on a higher basis* what we most emphatically and fully *owe* to Him as His redeemed creatures.

This principle runs throughout the Scriptures and applies to every dispensation: blessing is dependent upon obedience. Israel was to be immune from the diseases of Egypt only so long as they hearkened diligently to the voice of the Lord their God and did that which was right in His sight! But let us be clear on the point. The keeping of God’s commandments has *nothing* to do with our salvation. Israel here were *already* under the blood and had been, typically, brought through death on to resurrection-ground. Yet *now* the Lord reminds them of His commandments and statutes. How far wrong, then, are they who contend that *the law* has *nothing* to do with Christians? True, it has nothing to do with their salvation. But it *is* needful for the regulation of their walk. Believers, equally with unbelievers, are subject to God’s government. Failure to recognize this, failure to conform our daily lives to God’s statutes, failure to obey His commandments, will not forfeit our salvation, but it *will* bring down upon us the chastening “**plagues**” of our *righteous* Father (John 17:25).

A separate word is called for upon the closing sentence of verse 26: “**For I am the Lord that *healeth* thee.**” This has been seized upon by

certain well-meaning people whose zeal is **“not according to knowledge.”** They have detached this sentence of Scripture and “claimed” the Lord as their *Healer*. By this they mean that in response to their appropriating faith God recovers them from sickness *without* the use of herbs or drugs. From it they deduce the principle that it is *wrong* for a believer to have recourse to any doctor or medical aid. The Lord is *their* Physician, and it is distrust of Him to consult an earthly physician. But if this scripture be examined in its context, it will be found that instead of teaching that God *disdains* the use of means in the healing of His people, *He employs them*. The bitter waters of Marah were healed not by a peremptory fiat from Jehovah, but by a **“tree”** being cast into them! Thus, in the *first* reference to **“healing”** in the Bible we find God deliberately choosing to *employ means* for the healing and health of His people. Similarly, did He bless Elisha in the use of means (salt) in healing the waters at Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22). Similarly did God instruct His servant Isaiah to use means (a fig-poultice) in the healing of Hezekiah. So also in Psalm 104:14 we read, **“He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle and *here* for the service of man; that he may bring forth good out of the earth.”** So we find the apostle Paul exhorting Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake (1 Timothy 5:23). Even on the new earth God will use *means* for healing the bodies of the nations which have lived through the millennium without dying and being raised in glorified bodies: **“The leaves of the tree were for *the healing* of the nations”** (Revelation 22:2).

“And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and three-score and ten palm trees, and they encamped there by the waters” (v. 27). This does not conflict with our remarks upon the previous verses. Elim is the complement to Marah, and this will be the more evident if we observe their order. First, the bitter waters of Marah sweetened by the tree, and then the wells of pure water and the palm trees for shade and refreshment. Surely the interpretation is obvious: when we are walking in fellowship with Christ and the principle of His cross is faithfully applied to our daily life, not only is the bitterness of suffering for His sake sweetened, but we enter into the pure joys which God has provided for His own, even down here. **“Elim”** speaks, then, of the satisfaction which God gives to those who are walking with Him in obedience. This joy of heart, this satisfaction of soul, comes to us through *the ministry of the Word* — hence the significance of the *twelve* **“wells”** and the *seventy* **“palm trees”**; the very numbers selected by Christ in the sending forth of His apostles. (See Luke 9:1-10:1!) May the Lord grant that we shall so heed the lesson of Marah that Elim will be our happy lot.



A Classic Study: The Danger of Prosperity



A Classic Study by William Bates (1635–1699)

[Here we continue a study by the eminent English Puritan William Bates, concerning the danger of prosperity. In this issue, Mr. Bates is continuing to enumerate some rules on how to properly manage prosperity.]—*Ed.*

The Danger of Prosperity, pt. 12

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (Prov. 1:32, AV).

5. A moderate use of worldly things is an excellent preservative from the evil of adhering to them. It is a divine blessing to partake of the gifts of God with contentment and tranquility, and especially it is sweet to taste His love in them. God gives to a man that which is good in His sight, such as wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But the flesh is the devil's solicitor, and persuades men with a freer fancy, and looser affections, to enjoy the world more than is consistent with the prosperity of their souls. When Diogenes observed with the many sick and languishing persons, the hydropick, consumption, and other diseases, which people brought to the temple of Asculapius for recovery, and that after their sacrifices they made a luxurious feast, he cried out, 'Is this the way to recover health?' If you were sound, it is the speedy and effectual way to bring diseases, and being diseased, to bring death to you. It is applicable in the higher sense: the intemperate use of sensual delights, weakens the life and vigor of the soul in a saint, and certainly brings death to diseased souls, who habitually indulge their corrupt affections. The apostle says of the licentious woman, "**She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives**" (I Tim. 5:6): An allusion to a torch that is consumed by its own flames. Sensual lusts are cherished and pampered by prosperity, and the carnal heart overrules the whole man. Our Savior charges His disciples to beware surfeiting and drunkenness. The indulging of lower appetites is natural to men, but chiefly incident to those in prosperity. The great care of such should be to use worldly things with that modesty and measure that the divine part of the soul may be untainted by them: that it may neither over value nor over delight in them. The first degeneracy of man is by sensual satisfaction. This expelled him from paradise, and keeps him out ever since. The excess of pleasures darken the

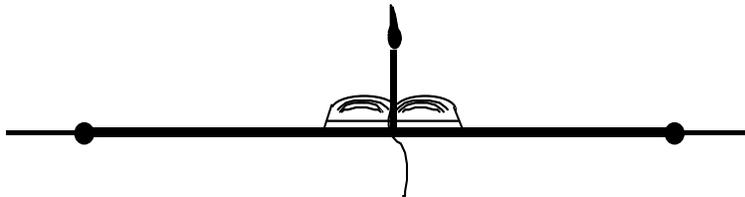
mind, stupefy the conscience, extinguish the radiance and vigor of the Spirit. Wine and women take away the heart. The apostle speaks of those who are abandoned to pleasures, who are past feeling, without a quick and tender sense of their sin and danger. That we may not in an unlawful degree use lawful things, we should always be ordered by the principles of fear and restraint, not indulging ourselves to the utmost of what may seem allowed. For, to be upon the confines of sin, exposes us to be easily overthrown the next gust of temptation. It is a divine command that Christians should rejoice, as though they rejoiced not, and as though they possessed not, and use the world as not abusing it. A Christian should converse with the world as a carnal person converses with heaven: he prays for spiritual blessings with that coldness, as if he had no desire to be saved. Such an indifference of the Spirit in outward enjoyments is our duty and safety. It is a prodigious disorder, and the great cause of the sins and miseries of men, that their affections are lavishly wasted upon their trifles. Their love, desires, and delights are let forth in their full vigor to the honors, riches, and pleasures of this world, but are wretchedly remiss to spiritual and eternal things. They would enjoy the world as their heaven and felicity, and use God for their necessity. And thus by embracing vanishing shadows, they lose the most substantial and durable good. It is a point of great wisdom to consider the several respects of temporal things, as they respect our sensitive part, and the present life, and as they respect our souls and the future state, and to use them, that the outward man may be a more active and ready instrument of the soul in working out our own salvations.

6. Let the favor of God, and communion with Him be most precious and joyful to us in the midst of prosperity. The highest esteem and most ravishing apprehensions of God, the dearest delight in Him, as the most excellent suitable good, and in whom the soul has the most intimate propriety, is the honor due to His incomparable perfection. The holy Psalmist often declares His transcendent valuation, and enflamed affection towards God: **“How precious are Thy thoughts unto me O God! How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake I am still with thee”** (Ps. 159:17,19), as if he breathed not oftener than he thought of God with reverence and complacency. Thus also he despises all that carnal men pursue with violent desires, in comparison of God’s favor, **“There be many that say, ‘Who will show us any good?’”** (Ps. 4:6), that is, a sensual good, for nothing is pleasant to them, but what appears in a fleshly fashion. **“Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. You have put gladness upon my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased”** (Psalm 4:6-7). The carnal man, who is a stranger to spiritual joys, has a sweeter relish of carnal things, than a saint that has a new nature, which deadens the appetite to dreggy

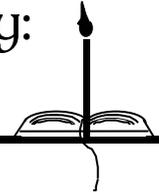
delights: And in the vintage and harvest, there is a spring tide of carnal joy. Yet David feels a more inward joy and cordial contentment in the fruition of God's favor, than a natural man has in the flower of his worldly felicity. Nay, he prizes the favor of God before life itself, which is our most precious possession in this world: **"Thy loving kindness is better than life, therefore my lips shall praise Thee"** (Psalm 63). Communion with God is the beginning of heaven, and differs from the fullness of joy that is in the divine presence above, only in the degrees and manner of fruition, just as the blushes of the morning are the same light with the glorious brightness of the sun at noon day. The natural man is averse from this heavenly duty, and most in prosperity. It is the observation of holy Job: **"They spend their days in wealth;... therefore they say to the Almighty, depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways"** (Job 21:13,14). It is the malignant property of worldly things to deface the notions, and cause a disrelish of sublime and spiritual things. The objects that pleasantly affect the carnal faculties, draw the soul from God. This is the principal and universal temptation of the present world, by the corruption of our hearts, and never so dangerous as in our prosperity. It is a rule in building, that chief care must be taken for the contriving of windows, for the transmission of a liberal light to refresh the inhabitants. Now, to build in a plain where the heavens are open on all sides, and the pure light shines, it is easy to make the house convenient: But to raise a luminous fabric in a city thick set with houses, and strained for room, requires art, and the building must be higher. Thus, a person that is surrounded with honors, riches and pleasures of the world, which are so apt to darken the soul and exclude the influences of heaven, has need of holy skill to preserve a free communication with God, and to be always receptive of His grace. Then holy duties should be frequent and fervent, wherein the soul ascends to God by raised desires, and God descends into the soul, by the operations of His sanctifying and comforting spirit. And as we see in nature, the flowers of every kind open their leaves to rising sun, to be revived with his vital heat; so we should every day open our hearts to God in prayer and praises. And since all His mercies invite and conduct us to the blessed author, and temporal benefits are sensible arguments of His love, those who most richly enjoy them are obliged infinitely more to value and delight in the giver, than in the gifts themselves. If the heart be set upon riches, which it is very apt to be when they increase, or upon pleasures, God is neglected and vilified. And though many are not openly vicious and profane, yet so pleasantly the things of the world insinuate into their affections, that they cannot taste how good the Lord is (a sad indication of their unregenerate state), for the divine nature in a saint inclines him to God as his supreme good, his only treasure and exceeding joy; and as soon as he begins to breathe the life of holiness, he dies to the vanities of the world. And when prosperity alienates the heart

from God, it is surely as destructive, as when it draws forth the sensual appetites into exorbitant and foul actions. A consumption kills as surely as a calenture. Those who abuse the favors of God to impiety and luxury, throw themselves headlong into the bottomless pit, and those who in their abundance are remiss and cold towards God, gradually descend thither. For God will not be our joy forever in heaven, if He be not our exceeding joy upon the Earth.

But when in the midst of prosperity, the soul is filled with a noble admiration of the divine excellencies, when it tastes incomparably more sweetness in the love of God, from whence outward blessings are derived, than in the things themselves, when the chief joy arises from the contemplation of his favor in Christ, whereby we are pardoned and preferred to be His brethren, co-heirs with Him of the immortal and undefiled inheritance, then we know how to abound. Our Savior commands His disciples not to rejoice that Spirits were subject to them, though an admirable testimony of His favor, but that their names were written in heaven. Much less should this perishing world be the matter of our joy, in comparison of our title and the blessed hope of heaven. Spiritual joy purifies and fortifies the soul against the ensnaring and corrupting allurements of the world. **“The joy of the Lord is their strength”** (Neh. 8:10), that of which He is the author and object, is both productive and preservative of the vigor of the soul, to resist the charms of the world. It is said of Orpheus, when he passed by the Sirens, who by their charming voices subdued men to sleep and then destroyed them, that he played on his harp and his harp, and the sweet sound, made him despise their singing, and prevented the danger. The fable is fitly moralized: Joy in the Lord, as our portion, and that infinity sweetness that is in communion with Him, makes such an impression upon the soul, that the ensnaring and destructive pleasures of the world are abhorred in comparison with them. That firm peace and pure joy passes the understanding, our most comprehensive faculty; whereas all the pleasures of the world do not satisfy our senses.



New Testament Study: Matthew 24:3-22



The Olivet Discourse - pt. 2

¹Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ²“Do you see all these things?” He asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

⁴Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

¹⁵“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel— let the reader understand— ¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁹How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sab-

bath.

²¹For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equaled again. ²²If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

The disciples responded to Jesus' prophecy that the Jerusalem Temple would be destroyed (see vs. 2), by asking: "**Tell us, they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'**" (vs. 3). As we discussed in the previous issue, it seems that the disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would occur at or near the time that Jesus returned, and at or near the "**end of the age**". Jesus' answer to their question contains prophecies about all three events, without clearly distinguishing between them, and without giving a time-line concerning when they will occur.

In fact, much of Jesus' response contains general directions to the disciples about distressing events that would occur in the future. "It is observable, that what Christ here says to His disciples tends more to engage their caution, than to satisfy their curiosity; more to prepare them for the events that should happen, than to give them a distinct idea of the events themselves" [Henry]. Jesus begins: "**Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains**" (vss. 4–8). Here Jesus gives a general warning to His disciples that they be not deceived by false Messiahs. There will come times of distress—"**wars and rumors of wars**", "**famines and earthquakes**"—but Jesus' disciples are not to be "**alarmed**" by these things. Also, Jesus warns of false Messiahs during such times of political and environmental upheaval. "One of the greatest temptations in times of difficulty is to follow blindly any self-proclaimed savior who promises help" [Carson, 497].

Indeed, Jesus in these verses prepares His disciples in all ages, not just those who lived near the time of the destruction of the temple, and not just those who will live near the time of the end of the age. Sadly, at all times in history, there are "**wars and rumors of war**", and there are also great natural disasters, such as "**famines and earthquakes**". In the past year, we have seen all of these things, as well as great storms and floods, tsunamis and pestilences. Jesus' message to us, His disciples, as we hear of such things, is: Do not be alarmed; He is in control; do not seek after other 'Christs'; He is the Lord forever. "We have one thing going for us

that the general public has not: we know that God is over all and that His purpose will in the end be worked out" [Morris, 598].

"All these are the beginning of birth pains" (vs. 8). The wars and rumors of war, the turbulence in the world, are evidences of a fallen world, a world that has, for the most part, rejected Christ, and the salvation He offers. These are **"birth pains"**, leading up to the eventual new heaven and new earth, which will come about at the end of the age. "Since the disciples confused the [destruction of the Temple with the end of the world], as though the Temple could not be put down without the ruin of the whole earth, Christ replies to the question put to Him with the caution that a long and sad epic of woes was upon them, that they must not hasten to seize the prize before they had gone through many contests and troubles" [Calvin, 83].

Along with these political and environmental upheavals, as Jesus warns His followers, there will be persecution of believers: **"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me"** (vs. 9). "He wanted to warn the disciples that the teaching of the Gospel (whose witnesses and heralds they were to be) would never win them the world's favor and applause" [Calvin, 80]. "It is one of the things that puzzle Christians in every age that, although they are doing their best to love God and their neighbor and to put love into practice by ministering to whatever needs they discern in those they encounter on their way through life, they are so often the butt of ridicule and the objects of hatred" [Morris, 599].

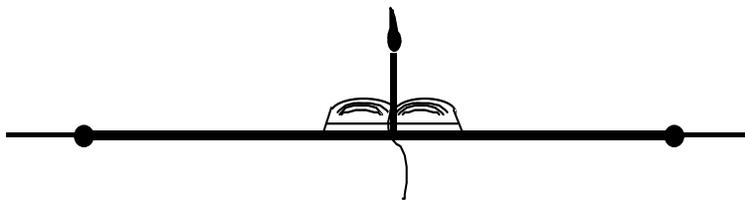
Jesus continues: **"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"** (vss. 9–14). Here is verse 9, and also in verse 30, Jesus uses the phrase **"At that time..."** In verse 30, Jesus is clearly referring to the end of the age, and here in these verses, I believe Jesus is also referring to the times just before the end of the age. Jesus speaks in general terms about the spiritual conditions at that time: **"many will turn away from the faith", "many false prophets will appear and deceive", "the love of most will grow cold"**. In order to assure His disciples that the Christian religion is not a passing fad, Jesus assures them that, before the end of the age, **"this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations"** (vs. 14). Despite the impediments described previously—the wars, the earthquakes, the persecution, etc.—the gospel will still be preached **"in the whole world as a testimony to all nations."**

Next, Jesus warns His disciples about a specific event: **"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desola-**

tion,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath" (vss. 15–20). Jesus warns His disciples to flee Jerusalem when they see "standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation'". We are not sure, at this time centuries later, to which specific event this refers in the destruction of Jerusalem. Presumably, the Romans entered and defiled the temple. This was to be a sign to the disciples that they were to leave the city because great destruction was to be coming.

Jesus uses the phrase 'the abomination that causes desolation' to tie His prophecy with a prophecy in the book of Daniel, where the same phrase is used. Speaking of the conqueror, Daniel prophesied: "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation" (Dan. 11:31; see also, Dan. 8:13; 9:27; and 12:11). It is quite amazing, even miraculous, how the prophecies in the Bible tie together, and relate to each other. Jesus uses Daniel's phrase to teach us that He is speaking of the same events that Daniel was.

As I said, it seems that the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy occurred during the destruction of Jerusalem. But, as occurs so much in prophecy, it seems that there will be a more complete fulfillment in the future. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, but with an eye also toward the end-times. "We must not suppose that this part of our Lord's prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord's words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a second siege of Jerusalem, which is yet to take place;... and to a second tribulation on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ" [Ryle, 317-318]. Jesus next seems to speak of this 'second tribulation', which will be even more horrible than the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70: "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (vss. 21–22).



A Topical Study: On Prayer



[As we continue our series on prayer, here we continue a study in which Richard Baxter answers questions about prayer.]

Some Questions About Prayer Answered, pt. 4 by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Question 31. How should a Christian keep up an ordinary fervency in prayer?

Answer. 1. See that knowledge and faith provide you matter; for as the fire will go out if there be not fuel, so fervency will decay when you are dry, and scarce know what to say, or do not well believe what you understand. 2. Clog not the body either with overmuch eating and drinking, or over-tiring labors; for an active body helps much the activity of the mind; and the holiest person will be able but poorly to exercise his fervency, under a dull or languishing body. 3. Rush not suddenly upon prayer, out of a crowd of other businesses, or before your last worldly cares or discourses be washed clean out of your minds. In study and prayer, how certain a truth is it, that work is not well done, which is done with a mind that is prepossessed, or busied about other matters; that mind must be wholly free from all other present thoughts or business, which will either pray or study well. 4. Keep a tender heart and conscience that is not senseless of your own concernments; for all your prayers must needs be sleepy, if the heart and conscience be once hardened, seared, or fallen asleep. 5. Take more pains with your hearts than with your tongues. Remember that the success of your work lies most on them. Bear not with their sluggishness; do by them as you would do by your child, who sleeps by you at prayer; you will not let them snort on, but jog them till you have awakened them. So do by your hearts when you find them dull. 6. Live as in the continual presence of God; but labor to apprehend His special presence when you are about to speak to Him; ask your hearts how they would behave themselves, if they saw the Lord, or but the lowest of His holy angels. 7. Let faith be called up to see heaven and hell as open all the while before you; and such a sight will surely keep you serious. 8. Keep death and judgment in your continual remembrance and expectation: remember how all your prayers will be looked back upon. Look not for your life: remember that this prayer for aught you know may be your last; but certainly you have not long to pray: pray therefore as a dying man should do. 9. Study well the unspeakable necessity of your souls. If you prevail not for pardon, and grace, and preservation, you are undone and lost forever. Remember that

necessity is upon you, and heaven or hell are at the end, and you are praying for more than a thousand lives. 10. Study well the unspeakable excellency of those mercies which you pray for: O think how blessed a life it would be, if you could know God more, and love Him more, and live a blameless, heavenly life, and then live with Christ in heaven forever! Study these mercies till the flames of love put life into your prayers. 11. Study well the exceeding encouragements that you have to pray and hope; if your hope decay your fervor will decay. Think of the unconceivable love of God, the astonishing mercy showed to you in your Redeemer, and in the helps of the Holy Spirit, and how Christ is now interceding for you. Think of these till faith make glad your heart; and in this gladness, let praise and thanksgiving have ordinarily no small share in your prayers; for it will tire out the heart to be always poring on its own distempers, and discourage it to look on nothing but its infirmities; and then, a sad, discouraged temper will not be so lively a temper, as a thankful, praiseful, joyful temper is, for gladness is a very expressive thing, and apt to show itself. Sad men are seldom eloquent; especially if the body be sick as well as the mind. 12. Let the image of a praying and a bleeding Christ, and of His praying saints, be (not on a wall before your eyes, but) engraven on your minds. Is it not desirable to be conformed to them? Had they more need to pray importunately than you? 13. Be very cautelous in the use of forms, lest you grow dull and customary, and before you are aware your tongues use to go without your hearts. The heart is apt to take its ease when it feels not some urgent instigation. And though the presence of God should serve the turn without the regard of man, yet with imperfect men the heart is best held to its duty when both concur. And therefore most are more cautelous of their words, than of their thoughts; as children will learn their lesson better, when they know their masters will hear them it, than when they think he will not. Now in the use of a form of prayer, a sleepy heart is not at all discerned by man, but by God only; for the words are all brought to your hand, and may be said by the most dull and careless mind; but when you are put to express your own desire, without such helps, you are necessitated to be so mindful of what you do, as to form your desires into apt expressions, or else your dullness or inattentiveness will be observed even by men; and you will belike one that has his coach, or horse, or crutches taken off him, that if he have legs must use them, or else lie still. And to them that are able, it is often a great benefit to be necessitated to use the ability they have; though to others it is a loss to be deprived of their helps. I speak not this against the lawfulness of a form of prayer; but to warn you of the temptations which are in that way. 14. Join oft with the most serious, fervent Christians; for their fervor will help your hearts to burn, and carry you along with them. 15. Destroy not fervency by adulterating it, and turning it into an affected earnestness of speech, and loudness of voice, when it is but a hypocritical cover for a frozen, empty heart.

Question 32. May we look to speed ever the better for anything in ourselves, or in our prayers? Is not that to trust in them, when we should trust on Christ alone?

Answer. We must not trust in them for anything that is Christ's part

and not theirs; but for their own part it is a duty to trust in them (however quarrelsome persons may abuse or cavil at the words): and he that distrusts prayer in that which is its proper office, will pray to little purpose: and he that thinks that faithful, fervent, importunate, understanding prayer, is no more effectual with God for mercy, than the babbling of the hypocrite, or the ignorant, careless, unbelieving, sleepy prayers of the negligent, will either not care how he prays, or whether he prays at all or not. Though our persons and prayers have nothing that is meritorious with God, in point of commutative justice, nor as is co-ordinate with the merits of Christ, yet have they conditions without which God will not accept them, and are meritorious in subordination to the merit of Christ, in point of paternal governing justice according to the covenant of grace; as an obedient child deserves more love, and praise, and reward from his father than the disobedient: as the ancient fathers commonly used the word merit.

Question 33. How must that person and prayer be qualified that shall be accepted of God?

Answer. There are several degrees of God's acceptance. I. That which is but from the common grace may be accepted as better than none at all. II. That which has a promise of some success, especially as to pardon and salvation, must be, 1. From a penitent, believing, holy person. 2. It must proceed from true desire, and be sincere; and have renewed faith and repentance in some measure. 3. It must be put up in confidence on the merit and intercession of Christ. 4. It must be only for things lawful. 5. And to a lawful end. III. That which is extraordinarily accepted and successful, must be extraordinary in all these respects: in the person's holiness, and in renewed faith and fervent importunity, and holy love.

Special Directions for Family Prayer

Direction 1. Let it be done rather by the master of the family himself than any other, if he be competently able, though others be more able; but if he be utterly unfit, let it rather be done by another than not at all; and by such an one as is most acceptable to the rest, and like to do most good.

Direction 2. Let prayer be suited to the case of those that join in it, and to the condition of the family; and not a few general words spoken by rote, that serve all times and persons alike.

Direction 3. Let it neither be so short as to end before their hearts can be warm and their wants expressed (as if you had an unwilling task to slubber over, and would fain have done); nor yet so tedious as to make it an ungrateful burden to the family.

Direction 4. Let not the coldness and dullness of the speaker rock the family asleep; but keep awake your own heart, that you may keep the rest awake, and force them to attention.

Direction 5. Pray at such hours as the family may be least distracted, sleepy, tired, or out of the way.

Direction 6. Let other duties concur, as oft as may be, to assist in prayer: as reading, and singing psalms.

Direction 7. Do all with the greatest reverence of God that possibly you can; not seeming reverence, but real; that so more of God than of man may appear in every word you speak.

Direction 8. The more the hearers are concerned in it, the more regard you must have to the fitness of your expressions; for before others, words must be regarded, lest they be scandalized, and God and prayer be dishonored. And if you cannot do it competently without, use a well-composed form.

Direction 9. Let not family prayer be used at the time of public prayer in the church, nor preferred before it, but prefer public prayer, though the manner were more imperfect than your own.

Direction 10. Teach your children and servants how to pray themselves, that they may not be prayerless when they come among those that cannot pray. John and Christ taught their disciples to pray.

Special Directions for Secret Prayer

Direction 1. Let it be in as secret a place as conveniently you can; that you may not be disturbed. Let it be done so that others may not be witnesses of it, if you can avoid it; and yet take it not for your duty to keep it unknown that you pray secretly at all: for that will be a snare and scandal to them.

Direction 2. Let your voice be suited to your own help and benefit, if none else hear you. If it be needful to the orderly proceeding of your own thoughts, or to the warming of your own affections, you may use a voice; but if others be within hearing, it is very unfit.

Direction 3. In secret, let the matter of your prayers be that which is most peculiarly to your own concernment, or those secret things that are not fit for public prayer, or are there passed by; yet never forgetting the highest interest of Christ, and the gospel, and the world and church.

Direction 4. Be less solicitous about words in secret than with others, and lay out your cares of the heart; for it is that which God most esteems in your prayers.

Direction 5. Do not, through carnal unwillingness, grow into a neglect of secret prayer, when you have time; nor yet do you superstitiously tie yourselves to just so long a time, whether you are fit, or at leisure from greater duties, or not. But be the longer when you are most fit and vacant, and the shorter when you are not. To give way to every carnal backwardness is the sin on one side; and to resolve to spend so long a time, when you do but tire yourselves, and sleep, or business, or distemper makes it a lifeless thing, is a sin on the other side. Avoid them both.

Direction 6. A melancholy person who is unfit for much solitariness and heart-searchings, must be much shorter, if not also seldomer in secret prayers, than other Christians that are capable of bearing it: and they must, instead of that which they cannot do, be the more in that which they can do; as in joining with others.

(This concludes our series on Prayer.)

A Study in Wisdom: Job 1:1-3 - Summary



[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl's study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]

Job 1:1-3 - Summary - The Godly Rich Man, by Joseph Caryl

¹There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. ²There were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. ³His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred oxen, and five hundred donkeys, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all men in the East.

From the whole of the first three verses take these observations:

First see here Job, a holy man, very full of riches; then observe, that riches are the good blessings of God. God would never have bestowed them upon His Job else. Lest we should think riches evil, they are given to those who are good: And lest riches should be thought the chiefest good, they are given to those that are evil. It is a certain truth, that God never gives anything in itself evil to those that are good; nor doth He ever give the chiefest good to those that are evil. Therefore it shows, that riches are good, because the godly have them; and it shows that they are not the chiefest good, because the wicked have them. When the Gospel calls us to renounce the world, to cast off the world, it calls us to cast the world out of our affections, not out of our possession. To hold and possess great riches is not evil; it is evil to set our hearts upon them.

Secondly, Job was described before, a just man, an upright man, that is, a man just in his dealing, a man that gave every one his own. He did not decline, no not a hair's breath (if possibly he could) from the line of justice, commutative or distributive; yet this Job is exceedingly rich. Hence, observe that:

Plain and honest dealing is no hindrance to the gaining or preserving of an estate.

Honest dealing is no stop, no bar to getting. There is a cursed proverb among us, which some use, and it is to be feared that some walk by it, that he which uses plain dealing shall die a beggar. You see Job, who was a plain man, a just-dealing man, yet is full of riches; the nighest and the safest way to riches is the way of justice. Woe to those who by getting riches, get a wound in their own consciences. What will it advantage anyone to

gather many goods, when in the mean time his heart tells him that all have a bad master? What will it advantage any to load, to freight his ship by trading on forbidden coasts, when by doing this, he splits and makes a shipwreck of his soul. If you would go the right way to attain the things of this life, walk in the ways of God. Honesty and justice, uprightness and truth will lead you to the highest and greatest estate, with God's blessing. All other riches are poverty, all other gain is loss; there is a fire in an estate ill-gotten, which will at last consume it. A man builds with timber that has a fire in it, when he lays the foundation of his estate by sin, **"he lays up iniquity for his children. And so doth God"** (Job 21:19).

It is commonly said likewise, "A rich man is either an unjust man, or the hire of an unjust man." In Psalm 82, the wicked are put for the rich: **"How long will you judge the unjustly and accept the persons of the wicked?"** (Ps. 82:2), that is, the persons of rich or great men, so it is to be understood; for judges would never accept the persons of wicked men if they were poor, if they be in equal balance with others, in regard of outward things. Then the opposition that is made in the next words: **"Defend the poor and fatherless"** (Ps. 82:3), shows that the rich are there meant. These great ones are called wicked, because they usually get and uphold their greatness by wickedness. Such is the course of the world, and it is the shame of the world, much more of Christians. We see in Job's practice that riches may be attained and maintained too by righteousness: Job was rich and just.

Thirdly, Job, a man fearing God, was rich, thus great. See here the truth of the promises. God will make good His promise concerning outward things to His people. **"Godliness has the promises of this life, as well of that which is to come"** (1 Tim. 4:8). As it has promises made to it, so it has promises performed to it; Job, a man who feared God, a godly man, is very rich. Indeed, **"not many rich, not many mighty, not many honorable, not many great ones are called"** (1 Cor. 1:16), and so not many of those that are called, are mighty, and rich, and great and noble: yet some such are, that the truth of the promises may appear sometime in the very letter to the eye of sense, as it always does to the eye of faith.

Do not fear that you shall be poor if you turn godly, for godliness has the promises of this life; and there was a rich Job, a rich Abraham, a rich Isaac, a rich David, and many other godly, rich. God will perform when it is good for them, the promises of outward good things to His children outwardly.

Fourthly, here is another observation from this place: Job was frequent in holy duties; he was a man who feared God, that is (as we explained it in the first verse), he was much versed in the ways of holy worship. He did not serve God by fits or at his leisure, but continually, yet he was very rich.

Time spent in holy duties, is no loss, no hindrance to our ordinary callings, or to our thriving in them.

Job serves God so frequently, that it is called continually, yet he grows in wealth abundantly. The time that he spent in the service of God did not rob his purse, impoverish his family, or hinder him in his dealings and businesses of the world. Job maintained both his callings: he maintained his general calling in the ways and service of God; and his special or particular calling in his relations unto men. Both went on together, and they were no hindrance to one another, but a furtherance rather. The time we

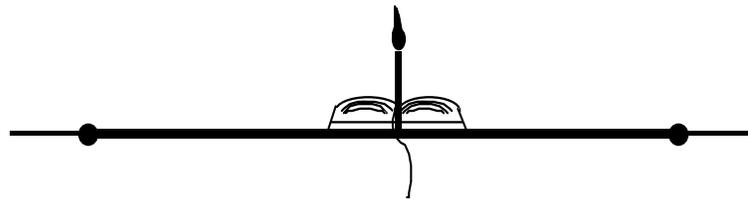
spend in spiritual duties, is time gained for secular. The pains we take in prayer, whets our tools and oils our wheels, promotes all we go about and gets a blessing upon all.

This meets with another blasphemy, very frequent in the world. If a man professing godliness go backward in his estate, especially a man that is taken notice of for his extraordinary zeal and constancy in holy duties, then the clamor is, "O you see what hearing of sermons has brought him unto, you see what comes of his praying and fasting, he has followed these things you see, till he is undone." I say two things unto these men:

First, many are thought to go backward in their outward estate, because they do so much in spiritual duties, when indeed they are so far from doing too much that they do too little, and that rather is the reason why they thrive not. The body may be exercised often, when the Spirit works, but seldom, if at all, in holy things; and this indeed provokes God many times to blast an outward estate. It is a common fault, that when we see those whom we conceive godly, failing in outward things, we are taken up only in finding out answers how to acquit the justice of God in His promises. What shall we say to such a promise, "**Seek first the kingdom of God and His rightness, and all these things shall be added unto you**" (Matt. 6:33)? We trouble ourselves often to satisfy the point in reference to the justice of God and the truth of His promise. We seldom suspect whether or how they have performed the condition of the promise. We should rather doubt that they have not evangelically performed the condition, than trouble ourselves so much with seeking how to satisfy the justice of God in answering the engagement and promise on His part. For without all question, they that do seek according to the tenor of that condition, God will administer all things unto them.

Or secondly, we should say thus rather, that they who are so much exercised in ways of communion with God, have surely gained a great spiritual estate, and that now God brings them to the proof of it by losses in their temporal estates. These, or the like interpretations, we ought to make, if we see them going backward in outward things, who have been very forward in spiritual things.

And so much concerning Job's outward estate, in regard of his riches, both what they were in the kind, and in the number.



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World's View of Godliness

"Some look upon religion as a sour severity and count nothing delightful, but what is suitable to fleshly affections. A deceit like that of a sick person who, feeling no pleasure, but in the easy intervals between his fits and the remission of his distemper, should imagine that if he were freed from his disease, he should lose all pleasure, though the delights of health are more full and durable. The angels are incapable of sensual pleasures; their happiness arises from the perfection of good, not the allays of evil. The beasts are only capable of sensual pleasures, the remedies of natural evils, hunger, thirst, weariness, or accidental evils, diseases, and pains: and many are so sottishly deceived, as to prefer brutish pleasures that affect the senses, before angelical joys that arise from the fruition of God's favor and obedience to His laws. This is a sad symptom of an unrenewed heart, and a heavy presage of future misery; for God will not be our everlasting joy in heaven, if He be not our exceeding joy upon the earth."

-- William Bates (1635-1699)

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