

# SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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

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## Old Testament Study: Malachi 3:6-3:12

### Robbing God

<sup>6</sup>“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. <sup>7</sup>Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

<sup>8</sup>“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’

“In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup>You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup>Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. <sup>11</sup>I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup>“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

The Lord is ever faithful; His people are unfaithful, as He points out through Malachi: **“I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,”** says the Lord Almighty” (vss. 6–7). God spared the **“descendants of Jacob”** because He is faithful to the covenant He made with the children of Israel. The children of Israel, however, did not keep the covenant, and **“have turned away from [the Lord’s] decrees.”** If God was as unfaithful as the children of Israel were, they would have been destroyed long ago.

God is faithful, and He is also forgiving. He gives His people a gracious invitation: **“Return to me, and I will return to you,”** says the Lord Almighty.” As long as we are on this earth, God gives us the free opportunity to return to Him, and be blessed by His presence. In actuality, God, of course, is never far away, such that He needs to physically return to us. “God is said to return to us, when He ceases to demand the

punishment of our sins, and when He lays aside the character of a judge, and makes Himself known to us as a Father. We indeed know that God neither returns nor departs, for He who fills all places never moves here and there. And we also know that we exist and live in Him, but He shows by outward evidences that He is alienated from us, and by the same He shows that He is propitious to us. For when He favours us with fruitful seasons, with peace and with other blessings, He is said to be near us; but when He lets loose the reins of His wrath, or exposes us to the assaults of Satan and to the wanton power of men, He is said to be far removed from us" [Calvin, 583].

And so, this request by God of us to return to Him is entirely for our benefit. He desires for us to know the blessings of being His children. Rather than accept this blessing, the children of Israel in Malachi's time claimed ignorance that they had any "returning" to do: **"But you ask, 'How are we to return?'"** (vs. 7). We need to be spiritually aware. We need to realize when we have gone astray, and have a need to return to God.

God was ready with an example of their disobedience: **"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings"** (vss. 7-8). Now, who would be dumb enough to rob God?! And yet, many of us do by skimping on our tithes and offerings, which support the Lord's work. Tithes and offerings were required of the children of Israel by the Law, in various places, and for various reasons (see Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:26-28; Deut. 12:17; Deut. 14:28-29). Someone might ask, "But do these laws apply to us Christians? To the New Testament believers?" (We are always looking for ways to get out of paying tithes!) I would answer that if God desired that His people provide for His servants in the Old Testament, who ministered the covenant that was a shadow of the things to come, then certainly God expects His people to provide for the ministers of His great and glorious Gospel.

And then how much should we tithe? Well, the word "tithe" means one-tenth, so one-tenth of your income is a good starting point. "Gross or net?" you ask. Well, offerings given to God were to be taken from the "firstfruits" (see Ex. 23:19; Ex. 34:26; et. al.), so I would say our tithe should be based on our gross income. I would advise that the "tenth" value be a guideline, a starting point. I would make sure that my giving was **"pressed down, shaken together and running over"**, so as to make sure that the total at the end of the year always exceeded a tenth of my income, for **"good measure"** (see Luke 6:38).

To cheat on tithes is to display a contempt for God's promise of providence. It shows that we do not believe that God will take care of us. "We think we have to store up the money for ourselves against the day when money may run out and God will be unable to provide" [Boice, 255]. An absurd line of thinking: to think that we can provide for ourselves better than the **"Lord Almighty"** can. As it happens, though, the act of cheating on the tithes was hurting the Israelites financially: **"You**

are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me” (vs. 9). “In seeking to rob God they robbed themselves, for they had failure of the harvest and famine, judgments corresponding to their sin” [Feinberg, 263]. “In trying to defraud God we only defraud ourselves” [JFB, 722].

Now, God could demand tithes with no recompense. We owe Him everything—life itself, yet He only asks for a tenth of what He gives us in the first place. And then, if we give back this tenth, He promises to bless us. Moreover, He dares us to test Him in this. In general, we are not to put God to the test, as it is written, “**Do not put the Lord your God to the test**” (Matt. 4:7; cf. Deut. 6:16). Yet, regarding tithes, God invites us to test Him: “**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it’**” (vs. 10). “If we would have God open His treasury, we must open ours” [JFB, 723].

For those who have not planned for tithing in their budgets, it is a difficult thing to get started doing. It may even seem impossible. So, I would recommend gradually working up to it. Set goals. Say, in two months, get up to giving five percent. And then a few months later, ten percent of your net income. And then, work up to giving a full ten percent of your gross income. God has dared us to “**test Him in this**”, so I am confident that you will find yourself blessed as you commit to this plan of action. In fact, quite possibly, those around you will notice how blessed you are. This is what God promised the children of Israel: “**I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the Lord Almighty**” (vss. 11–12).

Having said all of this, let me say that I think that many churches and many ministries concentrate too much on, shall we say, encouraging people to tithe. There are some ministries, most notably on television, that, it seems, spend all their time in encouraging us to part with our money. However, just because some ministries abuse the teachings concerning tithing, this does not mean we shouldn’t tithe. Abuse of the command to tithe does not nullify the command. However, we should be vigilant and use discretion concerning where we send our tithes. We should make sure that the church or ministry that receives our tithes is doing the work of God. May the Lord bless you as you trust in Him, and contribute to His work.

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## A Classic Study: PATIENCE IN AFFLICTION



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

[Here, we continue a reprint of excerpts from Richard Baxter's work entitled *Obedient Patience*. In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

#### Sufferings by Bad Children, Servants, Tenants or Subjects

Another case that needeth patience, is the suffering of superiors by bad children and servants, tenants, tradesmen, and others, whom they must use and trust. Of bad children I have partly spoken before. Natural love maketh this one of the heaviest afflictions in the world. When parents have been at all that suffering, care, labour, and cost, which go to the bringing of children into the world, and bringing them up from the breasts to maturity, and teaching them their duty to God and man, and preparing them to be useful to themselves and others, that after all this they should prove brutish, fleshly sots, that are slaves to their bellies, and wallow in the sink of filthy lust, and savour nothing but pride and fleshly pleasure, and the belief of God's word hath of serious holiness, and enemies of good men, and plagues to their country, and fight against the only means of their own and other men's salvation, oh!, what a heart-breaking affliction is this! Yea, when in case of the most ungodly error, or swinish appetite and lust, the counsel, the tears, the prayers of parents cannot move them to any true repentance or reformation, what a heavy cross that is.

Consider these things:

1. In this sad case, make not light of it, or as ungodly parents do, that are troubled more for their children's wastefulness and want than for their souls. And yet be not over-much cast down: neglect no means (prayer, counsel, company, etc.) which may tend to their recovery, while there is any hope; and especially look back (not with despair, but) with true repentance upon your own sins of youth against God, your parents, and yourselves. And then examine whether you have dealt with Christian wisdom and fidelity to have prevented their misery, in their education. Did you

with love and diligence labour to make them understand the things of God and their salvation? Did you labour to bring it to their hearts, that they might fear God and His judgments, and know the evil and danger of sin? Did you labour to make religion pleasant to them by showing them the goodness of it, and avoiding harsh, averting ways? Did you watch over their ways, and keep them from a custom of pleasing their appetites over-much? And did you engage them in wise and good company, and use them in religious exercises, and keep them from the infectious company of bad, licentious youths, especially in places of plays and gaming, drinking and idleness, wicked schools or academies, where temptations are too strong for fleshly, unexperienced youth. If you have failed in these duties, and have sent your children among the vicious, sensual, and malignant, whether on pretence of learning, ministry, courtship, breeding, or gainful trades, no wonder if both they and you do suffer by it, and if they be plagues to their country and to you, who have been plagues and treacherous to them, and sent them as into a pest-house, or a stews, and then are grieved for their diseases.

2. Be humbled for the viciousness of your own natures, which had the root of all these sins, and conveyed them originally to your children.

3. Let it make you the more sensible of the greatness of God's mercy, which hath healed your natures, and pardoned your sin, and saved you from that willful sottishness and wickedness, which others are given over to, of which you were in danger.

4. The thoughts of the far greater misery of most of the world, who lie in idolatry, infidelity, wickedness, or error, may somewhat drown the sense of a particular affliction: as the common plague in London did overcome the sense of the loss of our own friends; and the common fire overcame the sense of the loss of our houses.

5. Yet while there is life there is hope. God hath ways enough to humble and break the stiffest and the hardest heart: therefore pray for them and warn them to the last.

6. Grace maketh all Christ's members dear to us as well as our own kindred. Christ Himself answered, when they mentioned His mother and brethren, that they that heard God's word and kept it, were His mother, sisters, and brethren. And when one said, "**Blessed is the womb that bare thee,**" He said, "**Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it.**" Therefore rejoice in the welfare of all the children of God in heaven and on earth, who will be as dear to you as your own children.

7. Submit to God's absolute dominion, who best knoweth what to do with His own, and never did wrong to any, nor can do, and will satisfy all at last of the wisdom and goodness of all His dispensations.

II. Bad servants also are to some an exercise of patience: some will not learn nor be reformed, but hate goodness and live wickedly; some in drunkenness, filthiness, gaming, and play-houses; some deceive and rob their masters; some are eye-servants and slothful, and make no conscience of any fault or neglect which they can but hide, or excuse with lying; some burn their masters' houses, or undo them, or at least much damage them by heedlessness, carelessness, and forgetfulness; and the best oftentimes prove very costly by their neglects.

In all these cases, 1. Repent of all your neglects of them. If you have not diligently taught them the principles of religion, which should have made them better; or if you have not seriously endeavored their true conversion and sanctification, and bringing heavenly things to their hearts, which would have kept out the love of sin; or if you have not taught them a conscionable life, by a careful example of it in yourselves; be humbled, and acknowledge the justness of your correction, and bear it as the fruit of your own sin.

2. Be sure that the sin and misery of your servants be more grievous to you than your own loss and suffering by them. It is but temporal things that you lose.

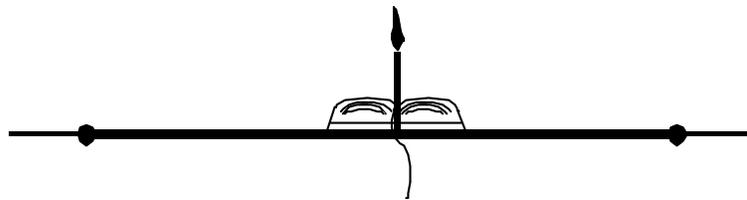
3. Remember what unprofitable and unfaithful servants you have been to God, and how much more He daily beareth with in us all.

4. Remember that the frailty of man is such that nothing will be done perfectly which imperfect persons do. The wisest and best are liable to many oversights, forgetfulness, and omissions, and have much which must be borne with.

5. Be the more careful that you fail not in any of the duty which you owe to them or any others: for our own sin hurts us more than others'.

III. What I say of servants, may serve as to the case of bad tenants, who will not pay their rents; and bad tradesmen, who unconscionably borrow and break, and live on other men's estates, and ruin others by their falseness. God will permit man's badness to show itself; and He will have all worldly things appear to be transitory, and unsatisfactory, and accompanied with vexation.

IV. As to the patience necessary in princes and magistrates to bad, provoking subjects, I am not to meddle with it, being discharged by rulers from being a monitor to them.





## New Testament Study: Matthew 13:1-23

### The Parable of the Sower

<sup>1</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then He told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears, let him hear.”

<sup>10</sup>The disciples came to Him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

<sup>11</sup>He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. <sup>12</sup>Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. <sup>13</sup>This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

<sup>14</sup>“In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. <sup>15</sup>For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

<sup>16</sup>“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. <sup>17</sup>For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

<sup>18</sup>“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup>The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup>But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. <sup>22</sup>The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

*(This study is continued from the previous issue. In that issue we dealt with the reasons Jesus was speaking in parables, i.e., verses 10-17. In this issue, we will look at the parable of the sower, and its interpretation)*

Chapter 13 contains seven parables about the kingdom of heaven. As we will see, all of these parables contain a common theme. They all speak of the division of men into two sorts of people: those who belong to the kingdom of heaven, and those who do not. The parables point out that these two sorts of people dwell together, intermixed, until the end of this age, when a separation of the two sorts of people will take place.

The first parable speaks of how the division comes about: the differing responses to the Gospel message. Jesus tells the parable: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other

seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear” (vss. 3–9).

In the previous issue, we talked about the difficulty of coming up with a proper interpretation for the parables of Jesus. For this parable, we are blessed to have an authoritative interpretation from Jesus Himself, which makes my task of discussing this parable very easy: **“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown”** (vss. 18–23).

The main point of this parable is that the preaching of the Gospel message can “produce different results in different hearers” [Morris, 335]. Interestingly, the differing results in this parable have nothing to do with the skill of the preacher. “Even if preaching were in itself perfect, it would have a very different effect upon different classes of hearers” [Broadus, 294]. In fact, in this parable, not much at all is said about the preacher. Only this: **“A farmer went out to sow his seed”** (vs. 3). We know only that this preacher was diligent in his work, for he sowed his seed everywhere, far and wide, in good and bad soil, hoping to produce results.

The first result Jesus speaks of is represented by the seed falling on the path: **“As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up”** (vs. 4). Of this seed, Jesus says: **“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path”** (vs. 19). Notice that the birds represent the evil one, the devil. The birds are given the opportunity to snatch up the seed because it fell on soil (in this case, a hardened path) that was not amenable for the seed to take any root, let alone flourish.

Note also that the **“evil one”** here is not part of the parable, but part of the interpretation. In other words, the devil is a real being, and Jesus

treats him as such. In this case, the devil actively, and successfully, **“snatches away”** the seed of the Gospel sown in the unbeliever’s heart.

The second result of the preaching is represented by the seed falling on rocky places: **“Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root”** (vss. 5–6). Of this seed, Jesus says: **“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once received it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away”** (vss. 20–21). It seems that this hearer was willing to take the good that comes with the Gospel, but not willing to pay the price that comes with it. Persecution, the testing of faith, will come to all believers. So, believers must be ready and willing to endure the trials and persecution that come from their faith. As Jesus told us: **“Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me”** (Matt. 10:38).

Note here that the joy (and whatever amount of faith that accompanied it) initially produced by the hearing of the Gospel was worthless. Untested faith is worthless faith. Tested faith is proven faith.

The third result of the preaching is represented by the seed that fell among the thorns: **“Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants”** (vs. 7). Of this seed, Jesus says: **“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful”** (vs. 22). The faith of this hearer is choked out by the things of this world. “We may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet insensibly give it no chance of bearing fruit, by allowing other things to fill a place in our affections, until they occupy our whole hearts. Alas, there are many such hearers! They know the truth well: they hope one day to be decided Christians; but they never come to the point of giving up all of Christ’s sake” [Ryle, 143]. Note that it is the **“deceitfulness”** of riches that is the barrier to faith. Riches deceive men because they promise all happiness and all contentment. Yet riches never deliver on this promise. In fact, the woes and miseries of the rich are well-documented (perhaps, too well) in the newspapers and tabloids every day. We must all see through the deceitfulness of riches, so that we may turn to Him who truly can give us happiness and contentment.

The fourth result of the preaching is represented by the seed that fell on good soil: **“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown”** (vs. 8). Of this

seed, Jesus says: **“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown”** (vs. 23). The preaching, thankfully, does yield a good result in some. However, “even of those who truly understand and receive the word, some exhibit better results than others.... That which yields a less abundant harvest is still called good ground, seeing that it does produce a real crop.... Yet we should all desire and strive to be not merely of those who bring forth, but of those who bring forth a hundredfold” [Broadus, 293].

The truth of the message of this parable is strikingly demonstrated over and over, wherever the word of God is preached. Some will be deeply moved and in tears at hearing the glorious Gospel; others, hearing the same words, will scoff. These reactions, as the parable points out, have little to do with the preacher himself. The sower, the preacher of God’s Word, can “scatter the seed committed to his charge, but he cannot command it to grow: he may offer the word of truth to a people, but he cannot make them receive it and bear fruit” [Ryle, 142]. In fact, as in the parable, the reaction has much more to do with the “character and preparation of the soil” [Broadus, 290], than with the skill of the preacher.

We praise You Father that, by Your Spirit, the seed of the Gospel that was planted in our hearts has produced fruit, that we have responded to the Gospel message and have come to a relationship with You. Continue to work in our lives, that we ourselves may sow seed that yields a bountiful crop. Help us to be faithful servants, and may You be glorified in our lives. In the name of Jesus we pray these things, Amen.



### Salvation Not in the Hearing

“Judas heard all Christ’s sermons.”

-- Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679)

## A Topical Study: The Frailty of Life



[Here we reprint a series of my own that appeared in these pages some time ago. It concerns the frailty of life, and so is closely related to the series on the shortness of life that we just finished.]—*Ed.*

### The Frailty of Life, pt. 1

**Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure. (Job 14:1-2).**

**My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue: “Show me, O LORD, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath.” (Ps. 39:3-5)**

**What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (James 4:14)**

This article begins a three-part series on the frailty of life. Each article will focus on one of the three passages cited above, and its context.

These passages deal with the frailty of human life: life is a “**fleeting shadow**” (Job 14:2), a “**mere handbreadth**” (Ps. 39:5), a “**mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes**” (James 4:14). It is interesting that though these passages are similar, they were written by three different men, each separated by approximately a thousand years, each existing in vastly different living conditions and situations.

The first passage was authored by Job. The Book of Job is thought by many to be the oldest book of the Bible, written even earlier than Genesis (which was written by Moses). Job was a rich, Godly man whom

the Lord tested by allowing Satan to afflict him. After losing all of his riches and all of his children, and then being inflicted with boils all over his body, Job spoke the words cited above concerning the frailty of life.

The second passage was authored by David. David had a very eventful life. When a shepherd as a young man, he was anointed by God to be the king of Israel, though the king at the time, Saul, was alive and well. Later, he became a hero for the people after he slew Goliath. He consoled the angry spirit of Saul by playing his harp and singing for him. He was later forced to flee from the jealous Saul, who was bent on killing him. After Saul's death, David was finally crowned king. Early on as king, he had many victories as he trusted the Lord for his strength. But later he fell into sin and became an adulterer and murderer. Though he thought he had gotten away with his sin, the Lord revealed it to a prophet who confronted David with it. Repenting from his sin, David returned to God's favor, but not unscathed from his sin. His own son rebelled against him and turned the hearts of the people against him, forcing David to flee once again. Sometime in the midst of this eventful life, David sat down and wrote the words cited above (from Psalm 39) concerning the frailty of life.

The third passage was authored by James. He grew up in the same household as Jesus, as His step-brother. He presumably watched Jesus, as a young man, grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, far beyond His age. James witnessed his step-brother performing astounding miracles as He gathered a following of disciples who began to proclaim Him as the Messiah. Yet, during Jesus' ministry on earth, as far as we can tell, James and the rest of the members of Jesus' earthly family did not accept Him as Messiah. However, after Jesus' death and resurrection, James came to faith in Jesus and became a prominent leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. In his epistle, James wrote the words cited above concerning the frailty of life.

Though each of the three men speak of the frailty of life, each does so for a different purpose and with a different emphasis. Job questions why God would be concerned with man, who is so frail and insignificant. David tries to ignore his need for God, but when he recognizes his frailty, he becomes aware of his desperate need for God. James uses the fact that man's life is frail to dispel the belief that we control the events of our lives, and to proclaim the fact that our lives are in God's hands.

In this issue, we will study the context of Job's passage concerning the frailty of life.



## Man's Need for God in His Frailty

<sup>1</sup>“Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. <sup>2</sup>He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure. <sup>3</sup>Do you fix your eye on such a one? Will you bring him before you for judgment? <sup>4</sup>Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one! <sup>5</sup>Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. <sup>6</sup>So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired man. . .

<sup>13</sup>If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! <sup>14</sup>If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. <sup>15</sup>You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. <sup>16</sup>Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. <sup>17</sup>My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin. (Job 14:1-6, 13-17)

Job begins by summarizing the plight of man: “**Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble**” (vs. 1). When he spoke these words, Job was a frustrated man, to say the least. He had been rich, now he had nothing; he had been blessed with many sons and daughters, now all his sons and daughters were dead; he had been healthy, now he was lying in bed with boils covering his body. Thus, Job came to the realization that man's days are “**full of trouble**”.

Job's afflictions also gave him the realization that man's days are “**few**”. When we are prosperous, when affliction is absent, when our lives are going well, we feel invincible. We feel as if we could live in our present state forever. We feel as if we are in control of our destiny, and we think that, as long as we continue in the strength of our own wisdom, our lives will remain prosperous, peaceful, plightless. It takes affliction to bring us back to reality. Job came to the realization through his affliction that the glory days of man are indeed brief: “**He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not en-**

**dure**" (vs. 2).

After these observations, Job went on to ask God a series of questions. In light of the insignificance and frailty of man, Job asked God: **"Do you fix your eye on such a one?"** (vs. 3). The rhetorical answer is "Yes". God does concern Himself with each of His creatures. Knowing this lead Job to ask his next question: **"Will you bring him before you for judgment?"** (vs. 3). The realization that God was watching him produced in Job a fear of God's judgment. By our God-given consciences, we all realize that we have sinned against God and deserve His judgment. Job recognized that man's case is hopeless in the court of God's judgment, which lead to his next question: **"Who can bring what is pure from the impure?"** (vs. 4). Job believed that it would be impossible for sinful man to be reconciled to God in His holiness, so he answered the last question himself: **"No one!"** (vs. 4).

With this answer, Job erred. Job was essentially asking the same question the disciples asked Jesus: **"Who then can be saved?"** (Matt. 19:25). Jesus' answer was: **"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** Job erred because he put the burden on man to save himself. At that moment, he did not consider that God was able and willing to save; Job did not realize that God, in His great mercy, would provide a way to **"bring what is pure from the impure"**.

Man's situation is hopeless in the absence of God's mercy. Job expressed the hopelessness he felt: **"So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired man."** (vs. 6). In our sin, we know that we cannot withstand God's holy gaze upon us. When we do not take into account God's mercy, we desire to flee from God in our sinful state.

Through this train of thought, Job discovered the most significant predicament for all of mankind: How can sinful man be reconciled to a holy God? Later on, in verse 13, Job groped for a solution to this predicament. He realized that it could be solved if God would show mercy: **"If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me!"** (vs. 13). Job insightfully realized that the solution to this predicament would have to come on the other side of the grave. Job understood man's sinful nature and the impossibility of man, as man, to be reconciled to God.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Job realized that the predicament possibly could be remedied given a new birth: **"If a man dies, will he live again?"** (vs. 14). In this, Job put his trust: **"All the days of my hard ser-**

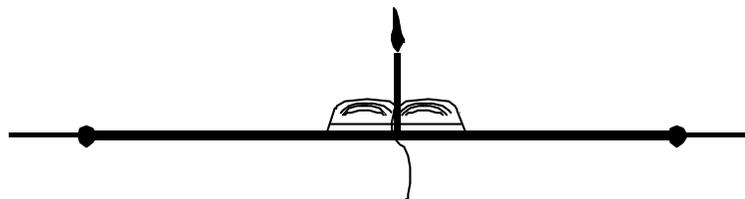
**vice I will wait for my renewal to come.”** (vs. 14). Job here illustrates Old Testament saving faith. First, understanding the sinfulness of man, Job realized that man needs God’s mercy. Then, understanding the nature of God, Job realized that God, in His mercy, would provide a way of salvation. As a result, Job put his faith in God for salvation.

It is noteworthy that Job came to this saving faith without the benefit of the revelation of the Bible. The Book of Job is thought to have been the first book of the Bible written, so, certainly, Job did not have any of the other books of the Bible to refer to. Rather, Job sincerely and humbly sought a relationship with God, although he knew that he did not deserve to be in God’s presence. Then, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Job came to the faith that God would provide a way for salvation. In verses 15-17, he expressed his faith: **“You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.”**

So, without benefit of the Bible or the church or missionaries, but by God’s revelation to him through His creation, Job’s conscience and by the Holy Spirit, Job came to a saving faith. Many people ask: “What about the native in Africa or South America or New Guinea, etc. who is not exposed to the Bible or to Christ? Can he be saved?” My answer: Does not Job’s example provide an illustration of how such a person could come to a saving faith?

Now, Father, we praise You for the salvation that You have provided through Christ. We praise You for the revelation of Your Word and Your Son so that we have the knowledge and assurance of salvation. Help us to realize how frail our lives are so that we may have a deep awareness of our need for salvation. We ask these things in Jesus’ name, Amen.

*(In the next issue, the series on the frailty of life will continue  
with a study of Psalm 39:1-7)*





## A Study in Psalms: Psalm 52

### Psalm 52 - A Psalm Against Evil

For the director of music. A *maskil* of David.  
When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him:  
“David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.”

- <sup>1</sup>Why do you boast of evil,  
you mighty man?  
Why do you boast all day long,  
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?  
<sup>2</sup>Your tongue plots destruction;  
it is like a sharpened razor,  
you who practice deceit.  
<sup>3</sup>You love evil rather than good,  
falsehood rather than speaking the truth. *Selah*
- <sup>4</sup>You love every harmful word,  
O you deceitful tongue!  
<sup>5</sup>Surely God will bring you down  
to everlasting ruin:  
He will snatch you up  
and tear you from your tent;  
He will uproot you  
from the land of the living. *Selah*
- <sup>6</sup>The righteous will see and fear;  
they will laugh at him, saying,  
<sup>7</sup>“Here now is the man  
who did not make God his stronghold  
But trusted in his great wealth  
and grew strong by destroying others!”  
<sup>8</sup>But I am like an olive tree  
flourishing in the house of God;  
I trust in God’s unfailing love  
for ever and ever.

**⁹I will praise you forever  
for what you have done;  
In your name I will hope,  
for your name is good.  
I will praise you  
in the presence of your saints.**

The occasion of this psalm, as noted in the inscription, is **“when Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’”** When Saul was looking to kill David, David fled with some of his men. While fleeing, he went to Ahimelech the priest for rest and sustenance. Ahimelech was not told that David was fleeing from Saul. In fact, Ahimelech was led to believe that David was sent on a mission by Saul. (See I Sam. 21:1–9). Later, Doeg the Edomite, who was Saul’s head shepherd, told Saul that Ahimelech had helped David. However, Doeg did not tell Saul that Ahimelech was not aware that David was fleeing from Saul. Saul had Ahimelech and all of the priests put to death. The king’s officials would not slay the priests, so Doeg himself killed the eighty-five priests. (See I Sam. 22:6–23).

In this psalm, David rails against the evildoer Doeg: **“Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?”** (vs. 1). There is a bit of sarcasm in calling Doeg a **“mighty man.”** Doeg, no doubt, did think he was a mighty man, a mighty servant of his king, as he killed the defenseless priests. But his feelings of **“might”** would have evaporated if he had realized the implications of his being **“a disgrace in the eyes of God.”**

Doeg was not able to comprehend these implications, though, because he was thoroughly evil. He **“boasts of evil..., boasts all day long.”** **“One of the most decisive evidences of reprobacy is to glory in our shame”** [Plumer, 568]. **“It is bad enough to imagine and to do mischief; but far worse to boast of it”** [Slade, in Plumer, 569]. Such boasting is short-lived. God is just, and in the end, He will bring justice.

David continues: **“Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth”** (vss. 2–3). Doeg’s tongue perpetrated much evil, bringing about the murder of eighty-five priests. Actually, it was what Doeg didn’t say that was evil. Doeg knew that Ahimelech was not aware that David was fleeing from Saul. He could have defended the priests. Doeg’s falsehood came from what he omitted.

The force behind Doeg’s sin was his hardened heart, which loved **“evil rather than good.”** **“Wicked men have a real love of sin. This is the secret of all their abominations. But for this they might easily be amended by instruction and example”** [Plumer, 570]. Though we all sin, God’s people do not love evil, even the evil that they do. We feel as Paul

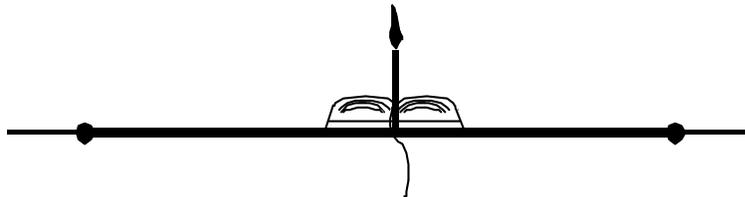
did: **“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing”** (Rom. 7:18-19).

Destruction is in store for those who do love evil: **“You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue! Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; He will uproot you from the land of the living”** (vss. 4-5). Certainly any earthly benefit received from doing evil is not worth it, if one considers the **“everlasting ruin”** that evildoers face.

The ultimate fate of evildoers should be instructive to us: **“The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, ‘Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold, but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!’”** (vss. 6-7). “The end of every sinner teaches us some good lesson, which we ought carefully to ponder” [Plumer, 571]. We should **“see and fear”** what happens to the wicked. The temptation is great for us to trust in our **“great wealth”**, and to **“grow strong by destroying others.”** If we **“see and fear”**, we may be able to withstand these temptations.

Also, we are more liable to withstand these temptations if we see and recognize what God is doing in our lives: **“But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God’s unfailing love forever and ever”** (vs. 8). The benefits we receive from God are far different than those received by those who **“grow strong by destroying others.”** Ours are lasting benefits, not temporal—benefits such as joy, contentment, and peace with God.

Recognizing God’s eternal blessings should spur us on to praise Him, even though we may be experiencing temporary affliction: **“I will praise You forever for what You have done; in Your name I will hope for Your name is good. I will praise You in the presence of Your saints”** (vs. 9). Perhaps the greatest difference between God’s children and those who are not God’s children is that we can have **“hope”** even in the direst circumstances. We know what **“God has done”**, and so we can have **“hope”** in what God will do. The fruit of this **“hope”** is the ability to **“praise”** Him in all circumstances.



FOR REFLECTION:  
Two Poems on  
Choosing the Gospel



**The Doomed Man**

There is a time, we know not when,  
A point we know not where,  
That marks the destiny of men,  
For glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen,  
That crosses every path;  
The hidden boundary between  
God's patience and His wrath.

-- Joseph Addison Alexander (1800-1860)

**Consider Well**

Consider well that both by night and day  
While we most busily provide and care  
For our disport, our revel, and our play,  
For pleasant melody and dainty fare,  
Death stealeth on full sily; unaware  
He lieth at hand and shall us all surprise,  
We know not when nor where nor in what wise.

When fierce temptations threat thy soul with loss  
Think on His Passion and the bitter pain,  
Think on the mortal anguish of the Cross,  
Think on Christ's blood let out at every vein,  
Think on His precious heart all rent in twain;  
For thy redemption think all this was wrought,  
Nor be that lost which He so clearly bought.

-- Sir Thomas More (1477-1535)

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### Dangers of Delayed Repentance

"Vice, as it groweth in age, so it improveth in stature and strength... so we shall dwindle and prove more impotent, for it feedeth upon our vitals, and thriveth by our decay; it waxeth mighty by stripping us of our best forces, by enfeebling our reason, by perverting our will, by corrupting our temper, by debasing our courage, by seducing all our appetites and passions to a treacherous compliance with it self; every day our mind groweth more blind, our will more rusty, our spirit more faint, our passions more headstrong and untamable; the power and empire of sin do strangely by degrees encroach, and continually get ground upon us, till it hath quite subdued and enthralled us. First we learn to bear it; then we come to like it; by and by we contract a friendship with it; then we dote upon it; at last we become enslaved to it in bondage."

-- Isaac Barrow (1630-1677)

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