

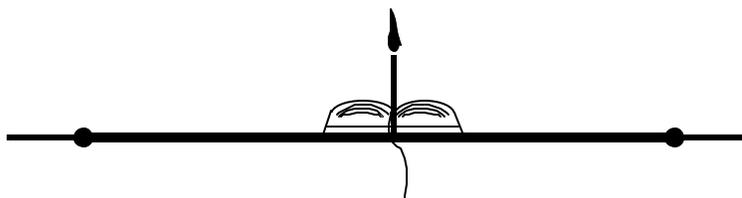
Scripture Studies

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

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Old Testament Study: Exodus 7-11

The Plagues Upon Egypt, pt. 3, by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, "Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth [with] blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt." (Exodus 9:8-9 AV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, "Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." (Exodus 9:22 AV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, "Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, [even] all that the hail hath left." (Exodus 10:12 AV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness [which] may be felt. (Exodus 10:21 AV)

6. The plague of the boils is recorded in Exodus 9:8-12. Like the third plague, this one was sent without any warning. Moses was instructed to take **"handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and sprinkle it toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh"** (9:8). The definite article implies that some particular **"furnace"** is meant, and that Pharaoh was near it, suggests it was no mere heating apparatus. The Companion Bible says of this furnace:

“i.e., one of the altars on which human sacrifices were sometimes offered to propitiate their god *Typhon* (the evil Principle). These were doubtless being offered to avert the plagues, and Moses, using the ashes in the same way produced another plague instead of averting it.” Just as the previous plague signified the worthlessness of all the *works* of the natural man, so this teaches the utter vanity of his *religious* exercises.

7. The next plague is described in Exodus 9:18-35. It marks the beginning of a third series. We quote from the Numerical Bible; “We are now, in the third stage, to see, man being what he is, what the attitude of Heaven must be toward him. The three plagues that follow all distinctly point to heaven as their place of origin. Here too the rod, which in the last three, had not been seen, appears again, — a thing which the typical meaning alone, as it would seem, accounts for. For it will be seen that the middle plagues, to men, seem scarcely Divine inflictions; they proceed more from man himself, although, in fact, the government of God may truly be seen in them. But now we come again, as in the first plagues, to direct, positive influences.” In other words, the last three plagues brought out, emblematically, the *state* of the natural man; the swarms of flies breeding from filthiness; the murrian (anthrax) of the cattle and the boils on man, telling of impurities within, which, through the corruption of sin breaks out in moral diseases; reminding us of that graphic but awful picture of the sinner drawn by Isaiah — “From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores” (1:6).

The *severity* of this plague is marked by several particulars. It was “**a very grievous hail**” (9:18). It was “**such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now**”. The hail was accompanied by an electric storm of fierce intensity, so that “**the fire ran along upon the ground**”. The effects were equally striking: “**The hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field and brake every tree of the field**”. This judgment was expressive of the *wrath* of a holy and sin-hating God. Similar expressions of His anger will be witnessed during the Great Tribulation — see Revelation 8:7; 16:21.

8. The eighth plague is recorded in Exodus 10:1-20. Locusts are one of the terrors of the East. They prey upon the crops, and consume all vegetation. This plague, coming on the top of the destruction of the cattle, seriously threatened the food-supplies of Egypt. Referring to this plague, the Psalmist says, “**He spake and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number and did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground**” (Psalm 105:34, 35). They

came at the bidding of God, and they departed at His bidding. So does every creature, the feeblest as well as the mightiest, fulfill the secret counsels of their Creator. In Joel 2:11, which speaks of a yet future judgment in the Day of the Lord, the locusts are termed, "**His army**". We are not quite sure about the deeper meaning and spiritual significance of this eighth plague. It is clear, that like the previous one, it definitely manifested the *wrath* of God. But there would seem to be an additional line of thought suggested by these "**locusts**". The second chapter of Joel and the ninth of Revelation should be carefully studied in this connection. In these two chapters we have a species of *infernal "locusts"* brought to our view. They issue from the Bottomless Pit, and the Anti-Christ, is said to be their "**king**". It would seem then that the plaguing of Pharaoh and the Egyptians with the "**locusts**" points to the yet future punishing of the lost in the company of *infernal beings*: as the Lord said, "**They shall be cast into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels**" (Matthew 25:41).

9. The plague of darkness is described in Exodus 10:21-29. Concerning this: "In Egypt the sun was worshipped under the title of Ra: the name came conspicuously forward in the title of the kings, Pharaoh, or rather Phra, meaning 'the sun'" (Wilkinson's "Ancient Egypt"). "Not only therefore was the source of light and heat eclipsed for the Egyptians, but the god they worshipped was obscured and his powerlessness demonstrated — a proof, had they but eyes to see, that One mightier than the sun, yea the Creator of the sun, was dealing with them in judgment." (Ed. Dennett).

This ninth plague formed a fitting climax to the third series. It is easily interpreted. God is Light: darkness is the withdrawal of light. Therefore, this judgment of darkness, gave plain intimation that Egypt was now *abandoned by God*. Nothing remained but death itself. The darkness continued for three days — full *manifestation* of God's withdrawal. So fearful was this "**thick darkness**" that the Egyptians "**saw not one another, neither rose any from his place**" (Ex. 10:23). Striking is the contrast presented in the next sentence: "**But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings**" (Ex. 10:23). This light was as supernatural as the darkness. It emanated, most probably, from the Shekinah glory. The Egyptians had a darkness which they could not light up: Israel a light which they could not put out. Thus it is upon earth today. The people of God are "**children of light**" (Ephesians 5:8), because God "**who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" (2 Corinthians 4:6). But "**the way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble**" (Proverbs 4:19), and this because they are

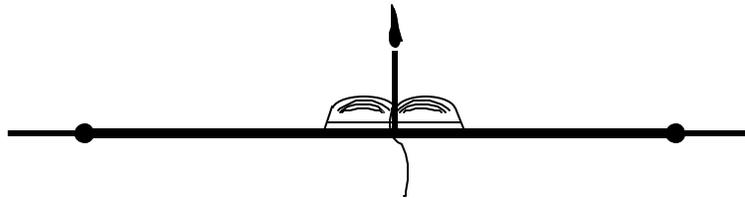
“without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

The three days of darkness which brooded over the land of Egypt remind us of the three hours of darkness over all the earth when the Savior hung upon the cross — outward expression of God’s abandonment. There the Holy One of God was being **“made sin”** (2 Corinthians 5:21) for His people, and He Who is **“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity”** (Hab. 1:13), turned away His face from the One who was being punished in our stead. It was this turning away of God from Him which caused the Savior to cry, **“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”** (Matt. 27:46).

Finally, this three days of dense darkness upon Egypt utters a solemn warning for all who are now out of Christ. Unsaved reader, if you continue in your present course, if you go on slighting the mercy of God, if you refuse to heed His warning to flee from the wrath to come, you shall be finally cast into **“the outer darkness”** (Matthew 8:12) — the **“blackness of darkness forever”** (Jude 13). Neglect, then, thy soul’s salvation no longer. Turn even now unto Him who is **“the Light of the world”** (John 8:12), and in His light thou shalt see light.

10. The final plague upon Egypt is recorded in Exodus 11 and 12. Comments upon this we will reserve for our next articles. In this last plague, the Lord did that to which all the other plagues were logically and irresistibly leading up — the slaying of the first-born. Terrible climax was this. Disease, desolation, and darkness had visited Pharaoh’s land; now *death* itself was to do its work.

The study of these plagues shows plainly the *character* of Him with whom we all have to do. The Lord is not indifferent to sin, nor can He be defied with impugny. He bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, but in the end His righteous judgments descend upon them. What point do these plagues give to that solemn word, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31)! Be warned, then, dear reader. Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not *your* heart. Remember what befell Pharaoh for hardening his! Flee then to the Divinely appointed Refuge. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.





A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction

A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here we conclude Mr. Baxter's fine study on bearing all types of affliction.]—*Ed.*

General Directions for Bearing Trials

I will draw out this treatise no longer, but to remind all Christians, that the common great defect of patience is a great dishonor to our profession of faith and heavenly hope, and leadeth us to that within as the cause, which we should be greatly humbled for; and that it is a disease so painful to ourselves, as should make us loth to cherish or excuse it. A tender state of body is not desirable, which can endure neither cold or air; neither winter or summer, &c. Much worse is a tender, impatient mind, that is hardly pleased by man or God; that is impatient at every loss or cross, at every real or supposed wrong, at every danger, threatening, or ill news; that must be stroked or rocked, and used as a child. Alas! many people that truly fear God, have so great a want of patience, as that one can hardly live quietly with them; but he must have extraordinary skill, and care, and tenderness, if not flattery, who will not be a trouble to them.

And yet because some causelessly judge these to be worse than they are, I will say again, that passion and the will's defection, are very different sorts of impatience.

I conclude with these few brief directions, for establishing the hearers with patience in all trials whatsoever.

1. Understand well the true nature of patience and impatience, that you mistake not natural temper for either saving grace or damning sin. The passions must be distinguished from the judgment and will. A man of a choleric temper, and aged, sick, or weak persons, may be peevish and impatient with the little provocations which daily befall them, so far as to be angry and trouble themselves and others. Children will cry and most women are more easily cast into passion than men; they are apt to fear beyond all reason, and to be troubled and troublesome to others to unquiet grief, displeas'dness or anger. This must neither be made light of, as no fault, nor yet made a greater fault than it is. Many men have stronger natures, and are free from passion (and some almost to stupidity), which

joined with grace and a due sense of weighty things, is a great advantage, and ornament: but it is found oft in the graceless, wicked men, who deceive themselves by it, and think they are better than passionate, honest men. Yea, it usually proveth a great hindrance to their repentance and reformation; no sermon, no reason, no thought of death or eternity, will move and change their senseless hearts.

But the saving grace of patience is principally in this, when a man hath so resolvedly given up himself to God by Christ for life eternal, and is so much under divine authority that he can endure the loss of all, even reputation, estate, friends, liberty, or life, rather than forsake Christ, or hazard his salvation by willful sin; and therefore also strives against all sinful passions, and repents of that which doth surprise him.

And damning impatience is, when a man cannot deliberately bear the loss of corporal prosperity for the sake of Christ and righteousness, nor hold on in a holy, righteous, sober life; but will rather fall off, and willfully sin, and venture his soul, than deny his flesh and be undone in the world: such take godliness for a grievous yoke, or else they would not be impatient to bear it, and they take not God and heaven for their best.

2. Nothing therefore will make one patient in a holy, saving sense, but the well-grounded, resolved choice of God's love in Christ, and the blessedness of another world, as that portion which must make us happy, whatever we lost or suffer on earth. Therefore faith and hope must be from above, and fetch from heaven the matter of our constant resolution, or else there can be no true patience: if we live more on earthly hopes and comforts than heavenly, and more to the flesh than the Spirit, there can be no true patience, much less durable: for in the world we shall have troubles; and if we have not, yet a content in the love of it is more damnable than trouble.

3. Therefore the true contempt of fleshly prosperity and worldly things, by mortification, is absolutely necessary to patience. While the body and its appetite, ease or life, is over-dear to us, we shall never patiently lose or spare them; and while we love the flesh and world, reputation, wealth, and pleasure too much, we shall be over-much troubled to lose them. Account all loss and dung for Christ, as Paul did, and you will easily bear the loss of it.

4. Think what you have, as well as what you want; reckon up truly all the riches of grace in Christ; to be a child of God, beloved by Him, an heir of heaven, a member of Christ, pardoned, justified, sanctified, under God's true promise of everlasting joy; and compare this with your suffering, and think whether it becomes an heir of heaven to be impatient in the way.

5. Therefore be diligent to make your calling and election sure; neither neglect necessary obedience, nor cherish causeless doubts, lest you lose that comfort of hope which must make you patient in all trials; else

when heaven and God's love should support you under all, you will be still questioning your title to it, and so have nothing to set against all your sufferings and fears. If this anchor of hope be not well-grounded, what shall uphold men in sufferings and death?

6. Live in constant belief and apprehension of God's absolute disposal of all the world and see all things and persons as in His hand, and remember that there is nothing comes to pass without Him, and that He uses even the permitted sins of men to His good and holy ends. Think on no man, or action, or event, as independent upon God; but remember still with whom you have to do, and who it is that overrides all, and whose rod your enemies and afflictions are: and this will tell you that nothing is done amiss by Him, and that nothing shall be finally hurtful to the faithful, and that we must not dare to accuse our Maker: and it will make you say, "It is the Lord, let Him do as seems Him good. The will of the Lord be done."

7. Here see still the certain end of all: how the sufferings of the faithful will end; and how the power, wealth, prosperity, and triumph of the wicked will end. Go into the sanctuary. Believe what God hath foretold you, and faith may fully satisfy you.

8. Keep a due humbling sense of your own and other's sin, and of God's common mercies to you and all men, that you may still perceive how much better God deals with you than you deserve. It is no small mercy to be alive, out of hell, and to have the free offers of a Savior, of pardon and salvation, and to have God entreating you to be reconciled to Him, and promise you Christ and life, if you do but willingly accept his gift.

9. Be acquainted with your chief temptations, both to impatience and to other sins, that you may live in arms and watchful resistance. 1. Renew not your own wounds and sufferings by gross negligence or willful sin, and yielding to the tempter; for if you put God to use a sharper rod, your patience will have a harder work. And do not by rashness make your own suffering, and run into it (as by words, by suretyship, and imprudent actions, many do): you may more confidently look for God's support under the cross which He layeth on you for trial, than that which you make for yourselves; though there also repentance may give us comfortable remedy. 2. And understand what are your temptations to impatience. Is it crosses, poverty, threatenings of men, a froward companion, a wicked child, or rather a weak and peevish, passionate temper? Whatever it is, get those particular considerations against it, which must be your armor, and live in the daily use of them.

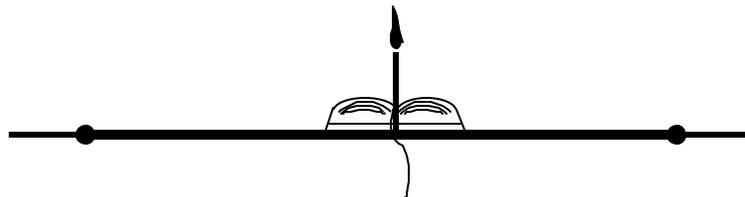
10. Resist the beginnings of unbelieving, troubling thoughts, and roll them not in your mind. Abhor the first degrees of distrusting God, or discontent with His providence, or any secret accusation of His disposals; and turn your thoughts presently to His love, and mercies, and promises, and Christ's abundant grace; pore not upon troubling and discontented

things any further than is necessary to avoid the evil; but study the satisfactory promises and terms of further grace and endless glory. Be careful (with distrust and trouble) for nothing, but in all wants and straits go to God and open all to Him, and ask Him for your daily bread, remembering that He clothes the lilies of the field, and that a sparrow moves not without His providence, and that all the hairs of your head are numbered, and that He knows what you need, and what is best for you, and that sufficient to the day is the evil thereof. Think what a mercy it is that He commands you to **“cast all your care on God, who cares for you”** (I Peter 5:7) and whether if the king bid a beggar or prisoner trust him, and cast all his care on him, it would not comfort him.

11. Forget not all the wonderful deliverances that you and the church of God have had, and how oft His mercies have confuted and reprov'd your distrust.

12. Lastly, thoroughly study a crucified Christ and the reasons and use of the cross, and why He will have us imitate Him and follow Him in His sufferings to glory. And never think God disappoints you, if He will but bring you safe into heaven. And read of the sufferings of Christ, and His sermons (see Matt. 5; John 12:14-16; Matt. 6; Rom. 8.; I Pet. 3 and 4.; James 4 and 5.; Rev. 2 and 3; Rom. 5:3-4; Col. 1:11; Heb. 4:12; 12:1ff; Rom. 12:12ff; 15:4, 5; I Tim. 6:11). **“For you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you may inherit the promise,”** (Heb 10:26). **“Count it all joy when you fall into divers [or trying] temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith (which is more precious than gold which perishes) worketh patience; but let patience have its perfect work”** (James 1:2-3). And show that you are patient toward God by your patience toward men. **“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another according to Christ Jesus,”** (Rom. 15:5). So prayeth your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

(This concludes Mr. Baxter's study.)





New Testament Study: Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiving

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’

³⁴In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Jesus had recently been speaking about how to deal with brothers who sin against you (see Matt. 18:15ff). This must have brought to Peter’s mind a related question: **“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’”** (vs. 21). Some would fault Peter for putting a limit

on forgiveness. It is an easy thing for us to fault him, because we already know Jesus' answer! I think we must give him some credit, for he was suggesting that, in forgiveness, he go beyond what was taught him by the religious leaders of the day. "Jewish rabbis are said to have taught people to bear injury three times and then to regard duty as done; if this is so, Peter's suggestion of 'seven times' was liberal extension and could be regarded as magnanimous" [Griffith Thomas, 272]. Peter was on the right track. Peter was taking for granted that he must forgive his brother, and that he must forgive him much.

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (vs. 22). The point in Jesus' answer is not that we are to keep count of forgiving, count up to seventy-seven, and stop at seventy-eight. No one in their right Christian mind would keep such a count. The point is, of course, to keep forgiving an innumerable number of times. I do think that many of us have problems with this and are not following the teachings of our Lord. Our Lord's attitude was to seek the best in people, and to be quick to forgive. The attitude of so many of us is to expose the worst in people, and to be quick to condemn. Such an attitude is not a proper Christian attitude. "What a happy world it would be if this rule of our Lord's was more known and better obeyed! How many of the miseries of mankind are occasioned by disputes, quarrels, lawsuits, and an obstinate tenacity about what men call 'their rights!'" [Ryle, 230].

Jesus goes on to tell a parable that teaches us Christians, who have been forgiven so much by our Lord, that we should also forgive others, or be guilty of the worst hypocrisy. He begins: **"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him"** (vss. 23-24). In this parable, the king represents God, and the servant, a Christian forgiven of his sins. **"Ten thousand talents"** is a huge amount of money. A **"talent"** was actually a weight, approximately 30 kg. (or around 60 lbs). So the debtor in the parable owed his master 10,000 talents of either gold or silver (which precious metal is not specified in the parable). In either case, the amount that he owed was enormous, into the millions of dollars. It was, effectively, unpayable by one employed as a servant. The servant's debt, of course, is representative of our debt to God: our sins are so numerous, and God is so holy, we can never repay this debt. "Sacrifice and offering would not do it; our good works are but God's work in us, and cannot make satisfaction; we are without strength, and cannot help ourselves" [Henry]. We must realize something: Every sin that we commit adds to our debt to God. There is an account kept of these debts, and they must be repayed, or forgiven by God (the creditor), upon His terms.

As was his right, the master in the parable initially set about to punish the servant harshly: **“Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt”** (vs. 25). Who would argue against the right that the master had to punish the debtor? Yet, there are many who would argue against God’s right to judge His debtors. When reading the parable, one cannot help but thinking what a fool the servant must have been: to build up such a large debt. We, in thinking this, are condemning ourselves, though. What fools we are to sin so much and build up such a great debt to our loving God!

Naturally, the servant begs for leniency: **“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’”** (vs. 26). The servant was either a fool or a liar, for it was quite impossible, given the enormity of the debt, for him to **“pay back everything.”** “This servant-debtor thought he only needed *patience*, but indeed he needed forgiveness! It seems strange that he did not see this, since the debt was so great, and he had nothing wherewith to pay, but was utterly bankrupt: yet it is a well-known fact, that men do not see their true condition before the Lord God, even when they perceive that in many things they come short” [Spurgeon, 256]. The servant asks for **“patience”**, but the master must already have shown great patience up to this point, given that the debt had built up to such an enormous sum. Our God too shows great patience with us, allowing us ample time to come to repentance. But there will be a time when we will be called to account for our debt of sin. As the writer of Hebrews teaches: **“[M]an is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”** (Heb. 9:27).

The master responded to the servant’s plea: **“The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go”** (vs. 27). Reflecting the nature of God, the master’s mercy exceeded what was asked. Much more than a temporary reprieve of patience to pay off an unpayable debt, the servant was totally forgiven his debt. God is very ready to enact compassion and mercy. Significantly though, “the servant was not forgiven until he came to his lord in humility” [Griffith Thomas, 274].

It is also noteworthy, I believe, that we find here no response of gratitude by the servant to his master for the forgiveness shown him. Instead, **“when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you own me!’ he demanded”** (vs. 28). We can see right away, from the violence with which he accosts his debtor, that the forgiven servant was not humbled, or affected spiritually in any way by being forgiven. It is as if he did not understand the value of the great mercy he had been shown. Now, the amount owed him, **“a hun-**

dred denarii", though not insignificant, was much, much less than what he owed his master. A denari was typically the amount of wages paid for a day's work. So he was owed, at most, in the thousands of dollars ("**a hundred denarii**"), while he had owed his master millions of dollars ("**ten thousand talents**").

The debtor plead his case: "**His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back'**" (vs. 29). Would not this plea have brought to mind his own to his master? The main difference between the pleas is that the servant's debtor actually did have a possibility of paying back the debt, whereas the forgiven servant owed so much that there really was no chance that he could repay such a sum.

The forgiven servant showed no mercy: "**But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt**" (vs. 30). This parable is so accurate in its depiction of human nature. We are so ready to accept forgiveness from God. In fact, we act as though somehow God owes us His forgiveness. And then, by our subsequent actions, we demonstrate that we do not fully appreciate all that God has done for us. We are so ready to condemn our brothers, and hold grudges, for the wrongs they do us, rather than forgive them.

We should pay careful attention to the sequel of the forgiven servant's actions: "**When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed**" (vs. 32-34). Jesus brings home the point of the parable: "**This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart**" (vs. 35). If we do not forgive our brothers, we demonstrate that we do not truly understand the forgiveness God has shown us, that we do not truly understand the Gospel message. "Those who receive extraordinary grace should act in accordance with the grace they receive" [Morris, 476]. "This is not intended to teach us that God reverses His pardons to any, but that He denies them to those that are unqualified for them. Though having seemed to be humbled, like Ahab, they thought themselves, and others thought them, in a pardoned state, and they made bold with the comfort of it" [Henry]. We must take to heart the words we say so often as we recite the Lord's Prayer: "**Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**" (Matt. 6:12).



A Topical Study: On Prayer

[Here we begin a series on prayer. We will start the series with a study by Jonathan Edwards on our God being a God who hears our prayers.]—*Ed.*

The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God, pt. 1 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

O Thou that hearest prayer. (Ps. 65:2, AV).

This psalm seems to be written, either as a psalm of praise to God for some remarkable answer of prayer in the bestowment of some public mercy; or else on occasion of some special faith and confidence which David had that his prayer would be answered. It is probable that this mercy bestowed, or expected to be bestowed, was some great public mercy, for which David had been very earnest and importunate, and had annexed a vow to his prayer; and that he had vowed to God, that if he would grant him his request he would render Him praise and glory. — This seems to be the reason why he expresses himself as he does in the first verse of the psalm: **“Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed,”** *i.e.* that praise which I have vowed to give Thee on the answer of my prayer, waiteth for Thee, to be given Thee as soon as thou shalt have answered my prayer; and the vow which I made to Thee shall be performed. In the verse of the text, there is a prophecy of the glorious times of the gospel, when **“all flesh shall come”** to the true God, as to the God who heareth prayer, which is here mentioned as what distinguishes the true God from the gods to whom the nations prayed and sought: those gods, who cannot hear, and cannot answer their prayer. The time was coming when all flesh should come to that God who does hear prayer. — Hence we gather this doctrine that it is the character of the Most High, that He is a God who hears prayers. I shall handle this point in the following method:

1. Show that the Most High is a God that hears prayer.
2. That He is eminently such a God.
3. That herein He is distinguished from all false gods.
4. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

I. The Most High is a God that hears prayer. Though He is infinitely above all, and stands in no need of creatures, yet He is graciously pleased to take a merciful notice of poor worms of the dust. He manifests and presents himself as the object of prayer, appears as sitting on a mercy seat, that men may come to Him by prayer. When they stand in need of any thing, He allows them to come, and ask it of Him; and He is wont to hear their prayers. God in His word hath given many promises that He will hear their prayers; the Scripture is full of such examples; and in His dispensations towards His church, manifests Himself to be a God that hears prayer.

Here it may be inquired, What is meant by God's hearing prayer? There are two things implied in it.

1. His accepting the supplications of those who pray to Him. Their address to Him is well taken; He is well pleased with it. He approves of their asking such mercies as they request of Him, and approves of their manner of doing it. He accepts of their prayers as an offering to Him: He accepts the honour they do Him in prayer.

2. He acts agreeably to His acceptance. He sometimes manifests His acceptance of their prayers by special discoveries of His mercy and sufficiency, which He makes to them in prayer, or immediately after. While they are praying, He gives them sweet views of His glorious grace, purity, sufficiency, and sovereignty, and enables them with great quietness, to rest in Him, to leave themselves and their prayers with Him, submitting to His will, and trusting in His grace and faithfulness. Such a manifestation God seems to have made of himself in prayer to Hannah, which quieted and composed her mind, and took away her sadness. We read (in I Samuel 1) how earnest she was, and how exercised in her mind, and that she was a woman of a sorrowful spirit. First, she came and poured out her soul before God, and spoke out of the abundance of her complaint and grief, then we read that she went away, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad (see verse 13), which seems to have been from some refreshing discoveries which God had made of Himself to her, to enable her quietly to submit to His will, and trust in His mercy whereby God manifested His acceptance of her. — Not that I conclude persons can hence argue, that the particular thing which they ask will certainly be given them, or that they can particularly foretell from it what God will do in answer to their prayers, any further than He has promised in His word; yet God may, and doubtless does, thus testify His acceptance of their prayers, and from hence they may confidently rest in His providence, in His merciful ordering and disposing, with respect to the thing which they ask. — Again, God manifests His acceptance of their prayers, by doing for them agreeably to their needs and supplications. He not only inwardly and spiritually discovers His mercy to their souls by His Spirit, but outwardly by dealing mercifully with them in His providence, in consequence of their prayers, and by causing an agreeableness between His providence and their prayers. — I

proceed now,

II. To show that the Most High is eminently a God that hears prayer. This appears in several things.

1. In His giving such free access to Him by prayer. God in His word manifests himself ready at all times to allow us this privilege. He sits on a throne of grace, and there is no veil to hide this throne, and keep us from it. The veil is rent from the top to the bottom; the way is open at all times, and we may go to God as often as we please. Although God be infinitely above us, yet we may come with boldness: **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”** (Hebrews 4:14, 16). How wonderful is it that such worms as we should be allowed to come boldly at all times to so great a God! — Thus God indulges all kinds of persons, of all nations: **“Unto all that in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours; grace be unto you”** (I Corinthians 1:2,3), etc. Yea, God allows the most vile and unworthy; the greatest sinners are allowed to come through Christ. And He not only allows, but encourages, and frequently invites them; yea, manifests Himself as delighting in being sought to by prayer: **“The prayer of the upright is His delight”** (Proverbs 15:8), and in Song of Solomon 4:14, we have Christ saying to the spouse, **“O my dove, let me hear thy voice; for so sweet is thy voice.”** The voice of the saints in prayer is sweet unto Christ; He delights to hear it. He allows them to be earnest and importunate; yea, to the degree as to take no denial, and as it were to give Him no rest, and even encouraging them so to do: Isaiah 62:6, 7. **“Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest.”** Thus Christ encourages us, in the parable of the importunate widow and the unjust judge (see Luke 18). So, in the parable of the man who went to his friend at midnight are (see Luke 11:5). Thus God allowed Jacob to wrestle with Him, yea, to be resolute in it; **“I will not let thee go, except Thou bless me”** (Gen.. 32:26). It is noticed with approbation, when men are violent for the kingdom of heaven, and take it by force. Thus Christ suffered the blind man to be most importunate and unceasing in his cries to Him (see Luke 18:38-39). He continued crying, **“Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”** Others who were present rebuked him, that He should hold his peace, looking upon it as too great a boldness, and an indecent behaviour towards Christ, thus to cry after Him as He passed by. But Christ did not rebuke him, but stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him, saying, **“What wilt thou that I should do to thee?”** And when the blind man had told Him, Christ graciously granted his request. — The freedom of access that God gives, appears also in allowing us to come to Him by prayer for every thing we need, both temporal and spiritual; whatever evil we need to be delivered from, or good eye would obtain: **“Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to**

God.” (Philippians 4:6.)

2. That God is eminently of this character, appears in His hearing prayer so readily. He often manifests His readiness to hear prayer, by giving an answer so speedily, sometimes while they are yet speaking, and sometimes before they pray, when they only have a design of praying. So ready is God to hear prayer, that He takes notice of the first purpose of praying, and sometimes bestows mercy thereupon: **“And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear”** (Isaiah 65:24). We read, that when Daniel was making humble and earnest supplication, God sent an angel to comfort him, and to assure him of an answer (see Daniel 9:20-24). When God defers for the present to answer the prayer of faith, it is not from any backwardness to answer, but for the good of His people sometimes, that they may be better prepared for the mercy before they receive it, or because another time would be the best and fittest on some other account: and even then, when God seems to delay an answer, the answer is indeed hastened, as in Luke 18:7, 8: **“And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though He bear long with them? I tell you, that He will avenge them speedily.”** Sometimes, when the blessing seems to tarry, God is even then at work to bring it about in the best time and the best manner: **“Though it tarry, wait for it; it will come, it will not tarry”** (Habakkuk 2:3).

3. That the Most High is eminently one that hears prayer, appears by His giving so liberally in answer to prayer: **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not”** (James 1:5, 6). Men often show their backwardness to give, both by the scantiness of their gifts, and by upbraiding those who ask of them. They will be sure to put them in mind of some faults, when they give them any thing, but, on the contrary, God both gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our undeservings. He is plenteous and rich in His communications to those who call upon Him: **“For Thou art good and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon Thee”** (Psalm 86:5); and Romans 10:12: **“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him”** — Sometimes, God not only gives the thing asked, but He gives them more than is asked. So He did to Solomon: **“Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour, so that there shall not be and among the kings like unto thee, all the days”** (1 Kings 3:12,13). Yea, God will give more to His people than they can either ask or think, as is implied in Ephesians 3:20. **“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”**

4. That God is eminently of this character, appears by the greatness, of the things which He hath often done in answer to prayer. Thus, when Esau was coming out against his brother Jacob, with four hundred men, without doubt fully resolved to cut him off, Jacob prayed and God turned the heart of Esau, so that he met Jacob in a very friendly manner (see Genesis 32). So in Egypt, at the prayer of Moses, God brought those dreadful plagues, and at his prayer removed them again. When Samson was ready to perish with thirst, he prayed to God and he brought water out of a dry jaw-bone, for his supply (see Judges 15:18,19). And when he prayed, after his strength was departed from him, God strengthened him, so as to pull down the temple of Dagon on the Philistines: so that those whom he slew at his death were more than all those whom he slew in his life. — Joshua prayed to God, and said, **“Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon”** (Josh. 10:12), and God heard his prayer, and caused the sun and moon to stand still accordingly. The prophet **“Elijah was a man of like passion”** with us; **“and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”**, as the apostle James observes in James 5:17-18. So God confounded the army of Zerah, the Ethiopian, of a thousand thousand, in answer to the prayer of Asa (see II Chronicles 14:9ff). And God sent an angel, and slew in one night an hundred and eighty-five thousand men of Sennacherib’s army, in answer to Hezekiah’s prayer (see 2 Kings 19:14-16, 19, 35).

5. This truth appears, in that God is, as it were, overcome by prayer. When God is displeased by sin, He manifests His displeasure, comes out against us in His providence, and seems to oppose and resist us; in such cases, God is, speaking after the manner of men, overcome by humble and fervent prayer. **“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”** (James 5:16). It has a great power in it; such a prayer-hearing God is the Most High, that He graciously manifests himself as conquered by it. Thus God appeared to oppose Jacob in what He sought of Him, yet Jacob was resolute, and overcame. Therefore God changed his name from Jacob to Israel; for, says He, **“as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed”** (Genesis 32:28). A mighty prince indeed! **“Yea, He had power over the angel and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto Him”** (Hosea 12:4) — When His anger was provoked against Israel, and He appeared to be ready to consume them in His hot displeasure, Moses stood in the gap, and by his humble and earnest prayer and supplication averted the stroke of divine vengeance (see Exodus 32:9, etc. and Numbers 14:11, etc).

(This study will continue in the next issue, D.V.)

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 68 (pt. 1)



Psalm 68 - God of Power, God of Grace

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

¹May God arise, may His enemies be scattered;
may His foes flee before Him.

²As smoke is blown away by the wind,
may You blow them away;
as wax melts before the fire,
may the wicked perish before God.

³But may the righteous be glad
and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.

⁴Sing to God, sing praise to His name,
extol Him who rides on the clouds—
His name is the LORD—and rejoice before Him.

⁵A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.

⁶God sets the lonely in families,
He leads forth the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

This psalm of David's depicts God as a God of power and might, who vanquishes His enemies, and a God of grace, who protects His people. David begins the psalm with a desire to see God's power over His enemies: **"May God arise, may His enemies be scattered; may His foes flee before Him. As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God"** (vss. 1-2). These opening words hearken back to the words Moses would recite whenever the Ark of the Covenant was moved: **"Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, 'Rise up, O LORD, may Your enemies be scattered; may Your foes flee before You'"** (Num. 10:35). Because of the similarity, we can conclude that it is quite probable that David recited these words when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to

Jerusalem (see II Sam. 6).

Moses would say, **“Rise up, O LORD”** at the moving of the Ark, because God’s presence would be shown to the people in the cloud that would accompany them on their travels. The glory of God would rise up before the people as they started to journey out into the wilderness. Just as the children of Israel in the wilderness had the presence of God in a cloud, we have the presence of God through Jesus Christ as we journey through the wilderness. I can’t help but apply these words of David prophetically to Jesus: **“May God arise.”** Of course, God did arise in the person of Jesus Christ, as He rose up from the tomb on Easter morning, and as He later rose and ascended to heaven.

The manifested physical presence of God incited the confidence of His people that He would intervene on their behalf: **“May His enemies be scattered; may His foes flee before Him. As smoke is blown away by the wind, may You blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God”** (vss. 1-3). Few would deny that the Lord of the Universe has the power and ability to vanquish His enemies. Many, however, doubt that God is willing to intervene in the affairs of men to do so. God’s visible presence before the children of Israel was a sign that, indeed, God is willing and does intervene in the affairs of men, and will vanquish His enemies.

It was not a difficult thing for God to vanquish His enemies: **“As smoke is blown away by the wind, may You blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God”** (vs. 2). “How galling to the pride of the seemingly mighty foes to learn that they have no more stability than the driven smoke or the melting wax!” [JFB].

In the presence of God, the enemies of God can expect nothing but destruction. However, the children of God can rejoice in His presence: **“But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful”** (vs. 3). “The Scriptures justly maintain a strong and fearful contrast between both the character and the destiny of the wicked and the righteous. They are not alike. They do not think feel, or fare alike” [Plumer, 669]. “The wicked flee from the presence of God, since it inspires them with terror; the righteous on the other hand rejoice in it, because nothing delights them more than to think that God is near them” [Calvin].

God’s presence must incite us to praise Him: **“Sing to God, sing praise to His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds—His name is the LORD—and rejoice before Him”** (vs. 4). “As it is a privilege, so it is a duty to be glad, to rejoice, yea, exceedingly to rejoice. He, who knows and loves and receives little, may rejoice little. But surely he, who has experienced the saving grace of God, ought not to be tame and torpid in exultations. If we duly rejoiced in God, we should not so often seek a portion here below” [Plumer, 669].

We have much to rejoice about when considering the character of our God. Though He is highly exalted as the Creator of the Universe, and though He can be an absolute terror to His enemies (see vs. 2), He is tender and compassionate to His own people, especially the more helpless of them: **“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling”** (vs. 5). “The name, ‘a father to the fatherless’, is one of the most tender appellations that could be given to God, and conveys one of the most striking descriptions that can be given of His character. We see His greatness, His majesty, His power, in the worlds that He has made – in the storm, the tempest, the rolling ocean; but it is in such expressions as this that we learn, what we most desire to know, and what we cannot elsewhere learn, that He is a Father; that He is to be loved as well as feared. Nothing suggests more strikingly a state of helplessness and dependence than the condition of orphan children and widows; nothing, therefore, conveys a more affecting description of the character of God – of His condescension and kindness – than to say that He will take the place of the parent in the one case, and be a protector in the other” [Barnes]. We, children of God, should follow our heavenly Father’s example, and protect the weak, and help the helpless. The way of the world is to give help only to those who can give some benefit in return. The way of the godly is to help those who can give nothing in return, to help those who need help the most.

David continues: **“God sets the lonely in families, He leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land”** (vs. 6). Again, we are given a contrast between the way God treats His people, and the way He treats His enemies. Even the weakest of His own people are given all they need. The lonely are given comfort and friendship, as He sets them **“in families”**, the fellowship of the children of God. The prisoners of sin are set free in Him, and leave their manacles **“singing.”** “In the first six verses there is a wonderful description of God in His majesty and meekness, in His might and mercy. The contrasts are remarkable. He scatters His enemies. He is a Father of the fatherless. The wicked perish at His presence. He sets the solitary in families. There is no sense of contradiction. Rather the unity of the apparently dissimilar things is at once felt. His righteousness is the strength of His mercy. His might is the ability of His to help. The righteous need have no fear of His strength, but rather rejoice in it, trust in it, and co-operate with it” [Morgan, 120].

(The study of this Psalm will continue in the next issue, D.V.)

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**God's Due and Deserved
Praise**

"He who does but exercise his reason in considering the infinite cost which the glorious God hath bestowed in erecting the stately fabric of heaven and earth, and the wonders discovered in the several creatures which are the inhabitants of the higher and lower house... will easily grant me this assertion: That this great Landlord of the world must needs deserve and expect a considerable rent of honour and service, somewhat suitable to the vast charge He hath been at. That man is the person designed to give Him His due and deserved praise, is the next unquestionable concession, no other of God's visible works being capable of His worship."

-- George Swinnock (1627-1673)

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