

The psalmist gathers historical evidence to show that in spite of the folly, the constant disloyalty and the disaffection of God's people, the Lord still loved them (and us) patiently watching over and providing. This historical account is recorded for our benefit, and particularly for our warning (**vv. 4-8**). The sins of God's own people were numerous: **vv. 8** (stubborn; rebellious; unfaithful); **11** (forgetful); **17** (repeatedly sinning); **18** (demanding); **22** (unbelief; untrusting); **36** (flattered God, then lied); **37** (vacillating hearts); **40** (grieved God)!

Psalm 78:41: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel."

- **Grammatical Usage:** "**turned back**" or in the Hebrew, "way·yā·šū·bū" meaning, "reverse; turn away"; "**and they tempted**" or "way·nas·sū" meaning, "exasperating, irritating, annoying"; "**limited**" or "hiṭ·wū" meaning, "to draw a line; artificial boundary".
- **Literal Interpretation:** They turned away, exasperating God, placing an artificial boundary on the Holy One of Israel.
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. Perhaps the most astounding statement appears in **v. 41** (KJV), where we are told that by their sins and follies God's people actually '**limited the Holy One of Israel**'. But can man limit God? Can the church limit His purpose and intention? Yes! Within the context of this Psalm we see that these people did limit Him – and you and I may do the same. In **v. 41** two great realities emerge:
 - God is ready and longing to do great things for and through His people. The whole Psalm demonstrates this: God is waiting to be our sufficiency and to use us in blessing to the world.
 - He is frequently prevented from proving His sufficiency in the experience of His people, and prevented from using them as He desires. The need is so great in the church, in the world and in our individual lives, and God is waiting to meet that need – but we limit Him. How?

1. Consider the people who are guilty of this great sin of limiting God's power and work. Then, it was Israel; today, it is the church – Christians. Note this: God's problem is not with the world; it is with His own people. We are wrong in thinking that the fault and deficiency today is outside the church. It is inside. These are days of spiritual indifference, apathy and apostasy – but these conditions are inside the church. Revival begins within. God's problem is not with the atheist, the agnostic, the infidel, the devotees of modern godless and political movements; God's problem is with His own people. See whom He addresses in **v. 1**.

2. Consider whom it is we are limiting.

We are limiting God – the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of mankind, the Sovereign God. We are limiting the One with whom all things are possible (**Matthew 19:26**) – and with whom nothing is too hard (**Genesis 18:14**). Look at three word-pictures of His mighty power – in **vv. 13, 20, 43-52**. Oh, the tragedy of limiting this loving, almighty God! – for His power is just the same today as it was yesterday (**Hebrews 13:8**).

3. How do we limit Him?

From this Psalm notice all the ways in which the Israelites sinned against God and displeased Him. The complete list is a long one, but notice the following seven ways in which we also limit Him:

- We limit God by our DISOBEDIENCE. Look at **v. 10**. The one fundamental condition of blessing in the lives of God's people is obedience, which simply means gladly and unquestionably doing what God says. How do we stand with regard to this? Are you a disobedient Christian? Look up **John 15:7, 10, 14** and note the condition (IF you obey); and compare **John 14:15; 1 John 3:21-24**. Disobedience limits God's blessing in and through us.
- We limit God by our FORGETFULNESS. Look at **vv. 11-17**. How many mighty things God has done for us! He has delivered us (**v. 12**); guarded us (**v. 13**); guided us (**v. 14**); and answered our prayers; at each fresh recognition of His goodness we have turned back to Him. Then, as the days have gone by, we have forgotten Him again! True? Forgetfulness limits God's blessing in us and through us.
- We limit God by our UNBELIEF. Look at **vv. 19-20, 22, 32**. How guilty we have been in committing this sin! Compare **Matthew 13:58** with **Mark 6:5**. Yes, and in **Matthew 17:19-20** we have a commentary on these other two references. Unbelief is a paralyzing sin; it not only paralyses us, but it limits God. Unbelief limits God's blessing in us and through us.
- We limit God by our WORLDLINESS. In **v. 33** we read "**so he ended their days in futility**" – and surely a modern phrase for this could well be 'vain imagination' (**Romans 1:21; 2 Corinthians 10:4; 5**). Many of us are worldly! We fail to realize that our citizenship is in Heaven (**Philippians 3:20**), that the Lord has called us out of the world (**John 17:6, 14, 16**), and has forbidden us to love the world (**1 John 2:15-17**). What is your answer to **Psalm 4:2**: "**O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?**" Worldliness limits God's blessing in us and through us.
- We limit God by our INSINCERITY. Look at the serious charge made in **vv. 36-37**; we are often guilty of this sin. It is so easy to sing our favorite consecration hymns – but do we mean what we sing? Look up **Matthew 15:7-9** and see what our Lord calls such people (**v. 7**: "**hypocrites**"). Insincerity means inconsistency in our life and testimony before the world. Insincerity limits God's blessing in us and through us.
- We limit God by our INGRATITUDE. Read **vv. 42-72**, and notice how they describe the love, patience and compassion of the Lord in spite of His children's sins and follies. How ungrateful and how unappreciative they were of His hand (**vv. 42; 54**), His signs (**v. 43**), His interventions (**vv. 44-51**), His guidance (**vv. 52-53**), His provision (**v. 55**), and His chastening (**vv. 59-72**)! Ingratitude limits God's blessing in us and through us.
- We limit God by our IDOLATRY. **V. 58**: an idol is anything that comes between us and the Lord; anything that we put in the place of God. A habit, a friend, a possession, a hobby or a sport could become an idol. Idolatry limits God's blessing in us and through us.

➤ **Conclusion:** Am I guilty of limiting God in and through my life?