

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)

Σήμερον καὶ αὐριον, καὶ τῆ τρίτῃ (LUKE 13:32).

ALLAN H. GILBERT, Cornell University.

The text of Luke 13:31-33 is as follows: 'Ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ προσῆλθάν τινες Φαρισαῖοι λέγοντες αὐτῷ· ἔξελθε καὶ πορεύου ἐντεῦθεν. ὅτι Ἡρώδης θέλει σε ἀποκτεῖναι. (32) καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πορευθέντες εἶπατε τῇ ἀλώπεκι ταύτῃ· ἰδοὺ ἐκβάλλω δαιμόνια καὶ ἰάσεις ἀποτελῶ σήμερον καὶ αὐριον. καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι. (33) πλὴν δεῖ με σήμερον καὶ αὐριον καὶ τῇ ἔχονμένῃ πορεύεσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἐνδέχεται προφήτην ἀπολόσθαι ἔξω Ἱερουσαλήμ. (That same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. (32) And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold. I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. (33) Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.)

The interpretation of the words *σήμερον καὶ αὐριον, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ* has always met with difficulties. Plummer<sup>1</sup> lists five interpretations of them: three actual days, the three years of the ministry, a long time, a short time, a definite time. The last he thinks 'probably right.' The second, being wholly figurative and incapable of proof or disproof, is, for those convinced of its correctness, inexpugnable. Plummer says that the same expression is used of three actual days in 'XIX. 10, 11,' apparently a mistaken reference which I have not identified. As to the literal interpretation, of three actual days, Godet suggests that 'it would be difficult to reduce so weighty a saying to greater poverty of meaning.'<sup>2</sup> In support of his view that the words symbolically express the idea of a very short time<sup>3</sup> he, like Plum-

<sup>1</sup> *The International Critical Commentary, Luke*, New York, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, to show that a supposed reference to the cries of the multitude on Palm Sunday is 'quite inadequate' to indicate the point of time referred to in verse 35, Plummer writes: 'Christ would not have declared with this impressive solemnity the fact that He would not enter Jerusalem for some weeks, or possibly months.'

<sup>3</sup> Three days ('three suns') seems to be used in the sense of a 'very short time' in Tennyson's *Ulysses*:

Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains; but every hour is :

mer, refers to Hosea 6:2, which, in the Septuagint, is as follows: *ὕγιάσει ἡμᾶς μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας· ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ καὶ ἀναστησόμεθα*. In support of a long time, one notes that the series of three days is twice repeated, possibly as though to emphasize the effect of length, and *αὔριον* is employed somewhat as in Joshua 22:28: *ἐὰν γένηται ποτε καὶ λαλήσωσιν πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ ταῖς γενεαῖς ἡμῶν αὔριον*. Plummer's preference, a definite time, does not conflict with any of the other four, if the definite time may be any clearly defined period, long or short.

It seems as though Plummer's interpretation might be advantageously expanded. First, a number of parallel passages may be adduced:

*τὸν χόρτον ὄντα σήμερον καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον* (Luke 12:28, and similarly Matthew 6:30).

*φάγωμεν καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν* (1 Cor. 15:32, from Isaiah 22:13).

*καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀπεστράφητε σήμερον ἀπὸ Κυρίου· καὶ ἔσται ἐὰν ἀποστήτε σήμερον ἀπὸ Κυρίου, καὶ αὔριον ἐπὶ πάντα Ἰσραὴλ ἔσται ἡ ὀργή* (Joshua 22:18).

*βασιλεὺς σήμερον, καὶ αὔριον τελευτήσει* (Ecclesiasticus 10:10).

*σήμερον δανιεὶ καὶ αὔριον ἀπαιτήσει, μισητὸς ἄνθρωπος ὁ τοιοῦτος* (Ib. 20:15).

Compare also *μὴ κανχῶ τὰ εἰς αὔριον, οὐ γὰρ γινώσκεις τί τέξεται ἡ ἐπιούσα* (Proverbs 27:1).

In all these the idea of sudden reversal is prominent. To-day the grass is green and flourishing, to-morrow dry and withered; to-day feasting and revelry, to-morrow their opposite, death. All show how transitory is any human state, and how striking a contrast two consecutive conditions may offer. This contrast, rather than any particular space of time, is apparently in the mind of Jesus. He does not mean that his period of healing the sick is to endure either a short time or a long time, so much as that it is to continue for a space—the definite time of Plummer—and then be abruptly broken off: the third day is to present a complete contrast to the days preceding.

---

From that eternal silence, something more,  
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
 Beyond the utmost bound of

In one important particular the parallel passages differ from Luke 13:32. They all deal with but two days (to-day and to-morrow), while it deals with three (to-day, to-morrow, and the third day). However, they are valid parallels, and Luke's verse is a more elaborate expression of the same sort: for they contrast two consecutive periods of time, each having its own verb (*ὄντα σήμερον, αὔριον βαλλόμενον*), just as it does (*σήμερον καὶ αὔριον ἀποτελῶ, τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι*); *σήμερον* in the parallels equals *σήμερον καὶ αὔριον* in Luke 13:32. The object of this expansion is probably to signify some continuance of time before the sudden reversal; there is an even progression of events, abruptly interrupted. This series, either long or short, being cleanly cut off, might be said to occupy a definite time. An English parallel presenting an ascending series of two days with a third day in complete contrast to them is furnished by a speech of Wolsey's in *King Henry VIII*; the Cardinal reflects on his own prosperity and sudden, unexpected ruin.

This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth  
The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,  
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;  
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;  
And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely  
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,  
And then he falls, as I do—(3:2. 353-359).

Some attention should be given to the passage as a whole. Its style is notable, being especially marked by repetitions, the most obvious of which is the series of verse 33: *σήμερον καὶ αὔριον καὶ τῇ ἐχομένῃ*. Clearly reflecting the series of verse 32, it differs in that it is not broken into two opposed parts, but is continuous, and modifies one verb. It denotes an unbroken period of undiversified activity. Commentators usually think of *τῇ ἐχομένῃ* as equivalent to *τῇ τρίτῃ* in verse 32, and this is possible. But it seems possible also to interpret the entire second series as equivalent to only the first part of the first series (*σήμερον καὶ αὔριον* = *σ. καὶ αὔ. καὶ τῇ ἐ.*). Two expressions of uninterrupted time are then equated; the first being thought of as sharply closed by *τελείωσις*, the other as indefinitely stretching on. In spite of the different setting, one is reminded of Macbeth's

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time

(It is interesting to note that Macbeth, as he continues, speaks of a sudden interruption of the series—'Out, out, brief candle!', 'his hour upon the stage,' etc.). Πορεύσθαι in 33 is echoed from 31 and 32. Plummer suggests that, since ἐξελθεῖν in 31 is not also repeated, the repetition of πορεύσθαι may be accidental, and takes the word to refer to the departure of Jesus from the domain of Herod. It seems also possible that in the mouth of our Lord the word, caught from the Pharisees, is used not of a departure from Galilee or Perea, but, figuratively, of continuance in the daily work of his life. Such a modification of the meaning of the repeated word adds to the effect of the passage, and explains why ἐξελθεῖν, which is incapable of figurative use, is omitted. Furthermore, Jesus also omits ἐντεύθεν, which the Pharisees used with πορεύσθαι. The parallelism<sup>4</sup> of the passage is obviously not exact and rigid. A literal interpretation of πορεύσθαι—to depart from Galilee—is harmonious with an entirely literal interpretation of the three days, but less so with one that is at all figurative.

Some commentators (see Meyer on the passage) take τελειοῦμαι as applicable to the completion of the work in hand—a needless reduction of the passage to its lowest significance. But if the word has such a meaning, the use is unique in the New Testament, for the verb always has either a direct object (*e. g.* τελειωσάντων τὰς ἡμέρας, Luke 2:43), or is used passively (*e. g.* Hebrews 5:9). A direct object (ἔργον, δρόμον) would be expected in Luke 13:32 if the reference were to completion of labors. Plummer explains the word as probably passive, and not middle, and renders it 'I am perfected.' In his usage it appears most typically in Hebrews, and Westcott, in his commentary on the epistle, gives a special discussion of τελείωσις to which Plummer refers. After that discussion, it seems hardly possible to insist on a low meaning of the verb in Luke 13:32. The following reference to the solemn subject of the death of Christ at Jerusalem throws its influence over the meaning of the verse in question. Having in mind his decease, our Lord in his reply to the Pharisees well might refer to more than the affairs of the moment, and glance forward to the abrupt termination of his earthly course.

<sup>4</sup> A further instance of parallelism is the repetition of ἐθέλω in verse 35.