



**ISSUES
IN
MISSIOLOGY**

VOLUME 1A

PERSECUTION

ROBERT D. PATTON, M.D., D.D.

**ISSUES
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MISSIOLOGY**

VOLUME I

PART 1A: PERSECUTION

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Issues in Missiology, Vol. 1A: Persecution

(Previously, Volume 1 was 2 parts: Part A, persecution and Part B, money and partnerships. Dr. Patton has split Volume I into the 2 parts. 1A Persecution and 1B Money Matters)

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my beloved wife of over 62 years, M. Elizabeth Patton, faithful helpmeet, extraordinary soulwinner and discipler of women, co-worker in the ministry, mother of four children, grandmother of 18 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. Proverbs 31: [28] *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

SAMPLE PAGES

FOREWORD



Dr. Robert Patton, veteran missionary with Baptist World Mission, has spent 34 years overseas. As a small boy, he accompanied his parents for 38 months in a prisoner-of-war camp in the Philippine Islands during World War II. From 1971-1976, he was Professor of Internal Medicine developing a program of Internal Medicine in a new medical school in Monrovia, Liberia. And from 1986-2012, he spent 26 years in Suriname, South America, primarily in church planting, Bible translation, development of discipleship materials, developing two Bible Institutes, and broadcasting over radio and television.

Dr. Patton has been burdened for three groups: those who have never heard; those who are untaught, and those who are being persecuted. Those who have not heard are unreached with the gospel; those who are untaught need the Word of God in their own mother tongue; and those who suffer persecution are located primarily in Muslim or communist countries.

In Volume I of *Issues in Missiology*, Dr. Patton addresses two challenges: Persecution, and Missions and Money. Christians are suffering in the third wave of persecution in the history of the church. The missionary needs to understand the nature and cause of persecution, and the proper Christian response. The missionary must also understand the dynamics of giving and the biblical principles involved, especially with the increasing discrepancy between financial resources in the west and in many parts of the developing.

A second volume in preparation will address two additional issues: Spiritual Warfare and Translation Issues.

The Pattons have four children 18 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. Dr. Patton and his wife Elizabeth relocated

at Crown College in Powell, Tennessee, with a goal of impacting the next generation of missionaries.

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PERSECUTION

Introduction

The Bible is a book written by persecuted Christians for persecuted Christians during a time of great persecution. It is estimated that as many as 5 million Christians died in the first century after Christ. Today, the estimate is that more than 80% of all martyrs of the faith are Christian. One reported figure was 166,000 martyrs killed for the faith in 2003, and by the current date, it is estimated that the number will perhaps exceed 200,000.¹ Approximately 200,000,000 Christians are under threat of death, imprisonment, or torture, and an additional 400,000 suffer some sort of discrimination.²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Martyr for Christ on the Grace of Suffering

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a martyr for Christ killed by the Nazis during World War II, wrote the following: “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”³ Thus the Bible, especially the New Testament, was written **by** persecuted believers **for** persecuted believers and dealt especially with persecution for righteousness’ sake.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer says: “When Christ calls a man, He calls him to die.” Bonhoeffer was greatly concerned about “cheap grace,” which is grace with no cost to the individual. By the phrase cheap grace, Bonhoeffer means the grace which has brought chaos and destruction; it is the intellectual assent to a doctrine without a real transformation in the sinner’s life. It is the justification of the sinner without the works that should accompany the new birth. Bonhoeffer says of cheap grace:

“[It] is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion

without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁴

Real grace, in Bonhoeffer’s estimation, is a grace that will cost a man his life. It is the grace made dear by the life of Christ that was sacrificed to purchase man’s redemption. Cheap grace arose out of man’s desire to be saved, but to do so without becoming a disciple. The doctrinal system of the church, with its lists of behavioral codes, becomes a substitute for the Living Christ, and this cheapens the demands of true discipleship. A set of rules replaces the dynamic indwelling Holy Spirit empowering the disciple. The true believer must resist cheap grace and enter the life of active discipleship. Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting; the Christian must rise and follow Christ.

It is here that Bonhoeffer makes one of his most enduring claims on the life of the true Christian. He writes that “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.” Men have become soft and complacent in cheap grace and are thus cut off from the discovery of the more costly grace of self-sacrifice and personal debasement. Bonhoeffer believed that the teaching of cheap grace was the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works.⁵

As we think about Bonhoeffer’s contrast of cheap grace with costly grace, we begin to understand the whole area of persecution a bit more clearly. The persecuted Christian is unlikely to go along with cheap grace. He will either capitulate to his persecutors, or he will develop as a disciple. And through this process, the church is purified and God is glorified. God’s grace is magnified.

Jozef Ton: Persecuted Romanian Theologian

Jozef Ton, who was beaten and imprisoned in Romania, has developed a very important theology of suffering and martyrdom. He points out that God’s ultimate goal is to populate the universe with true believers who will share in the responsibilities

of ruling the universe, who reflect the Lord Jesus Christ, and who bring glory to God Himself. He points out that our rewards in heaven have to do with reigning with Christ. We are placed here on earth where our character is developed and tested to prepare us for our future responsibilities. The trials and tribulations of this world both form our character and test our priorities to see how much responsibility we can handle in the future. God provides us with all we need, but we are responsible to allow Him to work in our lives. It appears that persecution does more than just test the individual's capabilities and commitment to the Lord, but that the development of his character is transmitted to his life after death as well as his life here on earth. This basic concept will be expanded later.⁶

Future Rewards and Suffering

The Bible has a number of terms concerning our future life in eternity with Him. These terms include the following: obtaining an inheritance, reigning with Christ, having treasures in heaven, or gaining rewards in heaven. We have a glorious future as believers, and He is working in our lives now to prepare us for this future. Unfortunately, often we focus on life on earth without thinking about a future eternal life in heaven.

God promises us incredible blessings in the future: *Revelation 1:[6] And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Revelation 5:[10] And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.* Jozef Ton comments on these promises. To quote Ton: "He wants to make us kings like He is King but will only entrust such positions to them who obey Him as He obeyed His Father." Thus, God is working to make us resemble Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter warns us as follows: *1 Peter 4:[12] Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as the though some strange thing happened to you. [13] But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings;*

that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye shall be glad also with exceeding joy. Persecution purifies the church as well as the believers. We need cross-carrying messengers of a cross-centered gospel.

Jesus promised: *Acts 1:[8] But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses (martyrs) unto me both in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* The Greek word, *marturia*, from which we derive the word *martyr*, means witness. Thus, Jesus says that you shall be martyrs.

We in the USA have suffered little persecution. It is very hard for us to imagine or identify with those who do. Persecution is not the equivalent of suffering. All people suffer at one time or another, but not all people suffer persecution. Persecution is suffering for righteousness' sake. *Mt. 5:[10] Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.[12] Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Basic Biblical Concepts: Concepts in Creation

As we study the Bible in terms of persecution, the creation of man is extremely important. Man was created in the image of God, and thus has intrinsic worth, respect and dignity. *Genesis 1:[26] And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created He them. [28] And God blessed them, and God said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air,*

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and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth....[31] And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. God works in creation even now on man's behalf.

God created man in His own image. Mankind could think, reason, have emotions and will. The very spirit of God could dwell in mankind. He was given dominion over the creation. God's goal was to have mankind fellowship with Him and rule over the entire created universe forever.

When man fell, and the image of God was marred, it was not eliminated. God still values the individual, even though he is now a sinner. *Genesis 9:[5] And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.[6] Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.* The basic responsibility to take a human life is now given to the government. The individual is not to take personal revenge, and man is still to be respected.

God's revealed character is found to be the basis of law. He expects us to act towards others as He acts towards us, because they are created in His image. God is concerned with minimal civil rights, especially to vulnerable groups such as widows, orphans, and strangers. These rights include the right to life, the right to be unharmed, the right to the necessities of life, and the right to protection of personal property. Humans have rights because God created them, protects them, and demands justice for them. God expects protection against such things as physical abuse, abortion, and being taken hostage.

When we do not respect man, we do not respect the God in whose image he is created! Islam and Communism do not acknowledge that man is created in the image of God. Islam specifically denies that any person can be like God and that God is entirely apart from all else in His creation (tawhid).

Communism denies the very existence of God. Therefore, neither belief has a philosophical basis for individual human rights, and neither group gives individuals these rights. Both groups are particularly virulent in their persecution of Christians. Their concept is that rights are given to a group, and not to individuals. They do not give intrinsic rights to humans because they do not accept that they are created in the image of God.

Furthermore, God is a Trinity and thus the God of relationships. Because we are created in the image of God, our rights also exist in the context of relationships. These rights include the right to worship in relationship with others. Our creation is also the basis for equality. Both men and women have rights. However, as the Trinity is not identical and likewise individuals are not identical.

In the framework of relationships between individuals who are different from each other, the three members of the godhead are bound together in love. True love is independent of the response of the individual who is loved. There must be freedom of the will to have true love. Thus, it must be possible for the created beings to reject or accept God in His position as creator. In his position as the image-bearer of God, man can reject God or obey and reverence Him. Satan will attack mankind precisely in this area of trust and obedience.

Basic Biblical Concepts: Satan and Persecution

God created both angels and mankind with free will. Freedom of will means that one is free to choose the wrong as well as the right. Free will allowed Lucifer to become Satan, the adversary. *Isaiah 14:[12] How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations![13] For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the*

PERSECUTION

congregation, in the sides of the north:[14] I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.[15] Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. It appears that Lucifer succeeded in convincing one third of the angels to follow him in rebellion. It also appears that once the angels made their choice, that choice became irreversible. Some churches like the universalist church believe that even demons can be saved. There is no evidence in scripture supporting this doctrine.

Satan now struggled with God for the loyalty of mankind. *Genesis 3:[1] Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?[2] And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:[3] But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.[4] And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:[5] For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.[6] And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

Satan succeeded in deceiving Eve and having Adam join her in their rebellion against God, thereby following the rebel, Satan. However, it was still possible for mankind to be redeemed, and this God proceeded to do. At the same time, Satan became the god of this world, and established his kingdom built on the principle of “me first.” Adam fell because he was not satisfied to be the “image-bearer” of the Creator, but to displace the Creator Himself.

Basic Biblical Concepts:

Sin, Suffering and Persecution

After the fall, sin brought both suffering and death. The woman will experience pain in childbirth and be subjected to a strain in her relationship with her husband, where she seeks to control him instead of allowing him to rule. The man was created to be able to work. However, now his work will be frustrated and accompanied by pain. Ultimately, his work will cease because of death. However, death is an act of mercy to prevent sin from multiplying out of control if men were to live eternally with a sin nature. The woman's fulfillment also would be limited by death. The snake, of course, was cursed to crawl on its belly and eat the dust of the earth.

Satan will ultimately suffer the loss of his relationship with God and eventual eternal punishment in hell. The serpent will be defeated by the seed of the woman, but the redeemer will suffer pain in the process. And God Himself suffered willingly, because suffering and death are the cost of redemption and restoration of mankind to Himself. But redemption would also bring Him great glory.

When God gave us free will, He gave us freedom to worship and obey Him personally and in relationship with others. In addition to the freedom to worship with others, we have a will that is free to choose to do what is right. Often, however, we choose the wrong because we are sinners with a sin nature.

The fall of Adam into sin has adversely affected our full expression of religious freedom. We long to have unrestricted freedom of worship in propagation of our faith. Often, however, the freedom of worship results in persecution. Religious freedom without persecution is a good thing. However, in a fallen world, the righteous will be persecuted. Lack of persecution can be good, but it can also indicate that the believer has backed off in his witness to a hostile world.

Basic Biblical Concepts:

Rights and Persecution

What about our rights? There is a difference between public rights and private rights. We may be called upon to give up some of our private rights. However, we should fight for public rights, even when we are willing to yield our personal rights. Furthermore, although we may give up our own personal rights voluntarily, this does not mean that we should insist upon others giving up their rights for the sake of Christ. Sometimes Paul used his rights of Roman citizenship, and other times he yielded these rights for the cause of the kingdom. We must discern what advances God's kingdom and not what advances our own plans.

Summary

When Adam chose to follow the deceiver, he chose the path that leads to death. That death is spiritual death as well as physical death. Sin and death require God to intervene for restoration of fellowship. As we experience the pain and trials in our lives, the pain that we experience points us to God, and to the eternal, where our true fulfillment lies. The price of reconciling creation to God is pain and suffering. God knew that man would spoil the universe, but in redeeming it, His glory would be seen. However, redemption would require suffering, including suffering by God Himself.

Through persecution for righteousness' sake, mankind will be tested and tried to demonstrate his worthiness for future responsibilities in heaven in his role as king and priest. Further, it does appear that the character which we develop on earth through persecution will actually be continued after death.

Religious Persecution Began Early

We find the first religious persecution early in the Bible, in Genesis chapter 4. It is a persecution resulting from the righteousness of Abel and the unrighteousness of Cain. It began at the first recorded formal worship service. It began also in the context of the home itself.

When God confronted Cain, His choice of the words "the

voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" refers to all the oppressed crying out because they've been denied justice. God hears, and God judges. God's mark on Cain shows that even a murderer is not beyond God's mercy and protection. God protects the right to life, even for those who do not deserve it. Unfortunately, although Cain had the opportunity to repent and bring the right kind of offering, he resented the fact that God preferred Abel's offering and remained separated from God.

Abel, then, is the first martyr. His life still speaks of the necessity for a blood sacrifice, and that good works such as Cain performed are not sufficient. *Hebrews 11:[4] By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

Furthermore, we find a general principle. Those walking in the flesh will persecute those walking in the Spirit. *Galatians 4:[28] Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.[29] But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*

As we trace further in the Bible, we find that Enoch preached against the ungodly lives of those around him. *Jude [14] And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,[15] To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.* We do not find direct persecution; God took him directly to heaven. *Hebrews 11:[5] By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

Then we come to Noah, also a preacher of righteousness. His preaching fell on deaf ears. He was only assisted by his own

sons in his huge work of building the ark. God judged mankind with a flood which killed everyone except the family of Noah.

A further development occurs after the flood. God delegates to mankind the responsibility of being the agents of his justice as upholders of the right to life. He places this right in the hands of the civil authorities. *Genesis 9:[5] And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.[6] Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* The individual is not to take revenge independently, but through government. This responsibility has never been removed since the flood.

Further Persecution in the Pentateuch: Abraham and Lot

In the story of Lot being rescued from persecution at Sodom, we learn an interesting lesson. Persecution is not restricted to spiritual giants or mature believers. I personally had doubted if Lot was truly saved until I read what was written about him in *2 Peter 2:[7] And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:[8] (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)[9] The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.*

There we find him referred to as “righteous (just) Lot.” Lot was a compromiser. Still, he was ridiculed by the godless men of Sodom, who threatened to assault him sexually. *Genesis 19:[9] And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.*

All who claim to follow God will be challenged to make a stand, including the compromisers. *2 Timothy 3:12. Yea, and all*

that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. This is a promise of God. God rescued Lot, but Lot paid dearly for his compromise. Compromise is no guarantee for protection from persecution.

In the life of Abraham, we find that true faith inevitably suffers, sacrifices, and hopes. Abraham left his family and home to travel to an unknown country. Twice his wife ended up in the harem of the ruler of the country, largely because of his lie that Sarah was his sister. He experienced disappointments, pain and tears. His greatest trial was offering Isaac, his son, to the Lord. But through his obedience, he was blessed, and all mankind with him. *Heb. 11[8] By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.[9] By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:[10] For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.[11] Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. . . [17] By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,[18] Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:[19] Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

Further Persecution in the Pentateuch: Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

Abraham's son Isaac had a number of problems with the Philistines. He was persecuted because of their envy over how the Lord had blessed him. *Genesis 26:[22] And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the*

land. However, he refused to retaliate, and the Lord continued blessing him, and the Philistines came to make a peace treaty with him. From him we learn that life may be filled with stress, opposition, and hardship. Likewise, Jacob suffered at the hands of his brother Esau and his uncle Laban, though much of his suffering resulted from his own sins and greed. It was only as he wrestled with the angel of the Lord that he became Israel, a prince with God.

We then read of Joseph, who, in a number of ways, was a type of Christ. He was somewhat proud and indiscreet and suffered at the hands of his unrighteous brothers. God used his trials over the next 13 years, both in Potiphar's house and in prison, to develop the character he needed. Joseph yielded to God and trusted him throughout these trials, and God was then able to use him greatly to save his people. When his brothers thought he would take revenge, he refused to do so. *Genesis 50:[20] But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

Many have observed that access to power often brings the individual to misuse the power for his own desires. We seldom see a dictator who does not abuse his power. But Joseph did not, but blessed his own people as well as the Egyptians for 80 years as the most powerful leader under Pharaoh when Egypt was the dominant world power.

Further Persecution in the Pentateuch: Israel Persecuted in Egypt and Suffering in the Wilderness

As we look towards the relationship of Israel and Egypt, we find that Israel suffered because they are God's people. Moses chose a life of hardship to liberate his people and suffered both from the Egyptians and from the Israelites themselves. *Hebrews 11:[24] By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; [25] Choosing rather to*

suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;[26] Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.[27] By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

God worked in the life of Moses so that he was rescued from a certain death in the Nile River. He was raised with all the skills and learning of the Egyptians since he was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He spent his first 40 years primarily raised as an Egyptian prince although he was aware of his Hebrew background. Moses fled from Egypt into the wilderness after killing an Egyptian. God worked in his life for 40 years in the wilderness with the simple life of a shepherd, which was an abomination in the sight of the Egyptians. He returned to confront the new Pharaoh and spend the last 40 years of his life leading Israel toward the promised land. He had many trials and hardships while traveling through the wilderness, including rebellion against him from the very Israelites whom he led. God met with him and conformed him to perhaps the greatest leader in the Old Testament. His problems thrust him to have a close relationship with God and changed his character.

Other Insights in the Pentateuch

Every good gift comes from God. Many blessings or curses result from man's response to God. We find this especially true in Deuteronomy 28. Some blessings and curses are also a result of God's plan for man. This is especially true in the life of Joseph. Blessings can become curses if we fail to glorify God through them. Joseph responded appropriately and experienced, at last, the blessing of God. In the long term, the sow-reap principle generally holds, but often it does not hold in the short term. Suffering is a part of God's plan, used for chastisement to bring His people to Himself. We must trust God in all circumstances and allow Him to work in our lives. Sometimes suffering is the result of our own sins. Suffering then can lead to

repentance and the glory of God. An example would be Zaccheus, who stopped extorting the people and paid back four-fold those he had robbed. As we yield to God, suffering can change the character of the sufferer to become transformed into the image of Jesus. And, praise the Lord, we know that ultimately sin and suffering are not permanent, and we will be free from both in heaven.

Suffering in Judges

As we trace Israel's history forward, we see that God often used suffering in His people to bring them back to Himself. The book of Judges has seven cycles showing this truth. God blessed His people, and also warned them, especially through Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. They were not to consider blessings as evidence of their own intrinsic goodness and were not to leave the worship of the true God. However, when the people would begin to live in luxury and become prideful, God would permit a disaster to occur, usually in the form of oppression from an enemy. The people would suffer. Eventually they would cry out to Him, and He would provide a deliverer, who would bring them to the area of blessing. Once again, they would begin to live in luxury and become prideful, and the cycle would repeat itself.

Judges 2:[16] Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.[17] And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.[18] And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.[19] And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in

following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.[20] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;[21] I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:[22] That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

The men we call judges were really military leaders who led the people to freedom. Sometimes the people would truly repent and return to the Lord, and the Lord would allow them victory. We can see a similar pattern in the lives of many of the kings. The victory, however, was temporary. Pride would arise, and the nation would ignore God or rebel against Him. The enemies were really used as His instruments to correct His period.

Job

When we come to the book of Job, we find new insights. The book begins with Job, the most righteous man on earth, being praised by the God of heaven. Before the host of heaven, Satan directly challenges God by stating that Job does not serve God because He is God, but only because he receives riches from God. God accepts the challenge and gives Satan the opportunity to remove Job's riches. Thus Job is allowed to suffer because of his righteousness to see if he will curse God when his riches are removed. Satan removes Job's goods and family, and yet Job blesses God. In the second round, Satan again accuses Job of not truly loving God, but worshipping Him because he still has his health. Again, God gives Satan a chance to test Job, and Job ends up with painful stinking boils from head to foot, sitting on an ash heap outside of town. Even his own wife tells him to curse God and die. However, Job reproves her and does not curse God.

PERSECUTION

Job's three friends arrive, and horrified at his condition, sit in sorrow with him for a full week. So far, so good. But unfortunately, they feel that they must advise Job as to the cause of his troubles. We can learn from his friends that suffering people need our presence more than our advice. Sometimes by our advice, we actually intensify their problems. Job's friends all believed that he was sinning, and that if he would repent, his fortunes would be restored. However, they were wrong. Job maintained his innocence, and his friends simply aggravated his pain. Thus, there is a mystery to suffering, and often we do not know why suffering occurs. Job longed for a mediator, but there was no mediator which he could see.

God finally answered Job. He did not answer the question "why," but the question "who." It is Almighty God who has permitted his suffering. Do we trust Him? We have already learned that some suffering is due to sin in our lives, and it is a corrective to bring us back to God. This is true particularly in the book of Judges and with the various kings of Israel. Suffering is sometimes part of God's plan to develop character in our lives, as in the life of Joseph. But here we see that suffering can be a witness to the faithfulness of the true believer and the worthiness of God. This witness is not only to mankind, but also to the hosts of heaven.

If God does not show us of what repent; if He does not point out the sin in our lives, then correction is probably not His goal for our suffering. Punishment without conviction is vindictive, as is punishment after confession and repentance. Both are against the nature of our God. Thus, we should go before God, seeking His face and asking the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and lives. If God does not convict of sin, or if sincere confession and repentance does not remedy the situation, then probably something else is going on. At that point, we need to love and trust God, knowing that this response will reveal the accusations of Satan as lies.

It is ironic that Job's friends themselves were called on to

repent, but they had not suffered. Job spoke rightly about God and did suffer. Again, we are reminded that all who would live godly shall suffer persecution, and that sometimes there is a certain mystery in suffering. Job's suffering was the direct result of his faithfulness to God. This is against the so-called Word of Faith teachings. If we insist on finding the meaning of every isolated event or trial, we will make mistakes. We cannot see the big picture, but God does. For example, we could make many mistakes in analyzing Joseph's situation until we see the end result of Joseph ruling over the entire land of Egypt. Most of us would never have suspected how Satan challenged the Lord until it was revealed to us in Job.

Persecution and Suffering in the Psalms

As we continue in the wisdom literature, the Psalms are a rich source of material concerning persecution. The Jews had over 1000 years of history of persecution and abuse prior to Christ, and the New Testament believers could look back on the Scriptures to see validation of persecution for righteousness sake. Many of the Jews had learned the Psalms since their childhood. When Jesus cried out on the cross *Psalm 22:[1] My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* some of the Jews in attendance at the crucifixion of our Lord would be able to see the truth of that Psalm being lived out before them: the gambling for the clothes, the piercing of hands and feet, and the mocking crowd. Yet, the Psalm ends with praise and thanksgiving.

We find similar truths in *Psalm 31:[5] Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. Jesus quoted this on the cross. We find a statement in Psalm 34:[19] Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. [20] He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.* The righteous can expect many afflictions. But they can expect God's deliverance too. Psalm 34 also predicts that Jesus' bones will not be broken, as were the bones of the other two who were crucified. In Psalm 35, they hated

Christ without a cause, and in *Psalm 41*, *His own friend betrayed Him. 41:[9] Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*

Psalm 44 also shows how the righteous are persecuted: *44:[22] Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Psalm 69 is quoted several times, particularly vs. [21] They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* Again, they could see that verse lived out at the cross. *Psalm 118:[22] The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.[23] This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.* These verses are quoted more often in the New Testament than any other verses in the Psalms. They are viewed as referring to the rejection of Christ - again the rejection of the righteous.

As a whole, the Psalms give us the understanding and the right words for handling a wide variety of circumstances, including persecution. They can help us to understand the persecution of the righteous, like Jesus Christ, and help us when we face persecution ourselves. The imprecatory psalms, which cry for punishment of the wicked, are also a cry for divine justice. God is not shocked with the strong feelings of the persecuted. But the psalms do not advise the individual himself to do the punishing, but for God to punish. Actually, these psalms may remind us to confess our own sins when we are unrighteous. And many view these psalms as the actual prayers of our sinless High Priest on our behalf.

Persecution and Suffering in Other Wisdom Literature

Ecclesiastes shows that life on earth does not always make sense. It shows that sometimes right does not prevail and on earth the righteous are not always rewarded. That is reality - but there is a God in heaven who will eventually make everything right. Likewise, Proverbs reminds us that the righteous can expect persecution in this fallen world. *Proverbs 29:[10] The*

bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.

Furthermore, we have a responsibility to help the weak and helpless. *Proverbs 29:[7] The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.* There is further advice for kings, but also for everyone. *Proverbs 31:[4] It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:[5] Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted....[8] Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.[9] Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.*

Further Old Testament Examples of Individuals Suffering for Righteousness Sake

We find a number of examples in the Old Testament of individuals suffering for righteousness sake. This was true for Abel. It is particularly true for the prophets. Here is a short list of some persecuted for righteousness sake:⁷

1. Moses threatened with stoning by his own people
2. David threatened by Saul on several occasions
3. 85 priests of Nob killed by Doeg and Saul
4. Many prophets hunted and killed by Jezebel
5. Elijah persecuted by Ahab & Jezebel
6. Micaiah imprisoned by King Ahab
7. Elisha threatened by death by the king
8. Hanani imprisoned by King Asa
9. Zachariah stoned at the order of King Joas
10. Jeremiah suffered greatly from both kings and false prophets
11. Uriah the prophet is caught and executed