

The Bible Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

40. Persecution

This series of studies is based on the
Comprehensive Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*.
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
from TEENAGERS to ADULTS.

For more information and free downloads go to:
www.thebibleunpacked.net

An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

The Bible Unpacked™

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40. Persecution

Composed by Paul Mallison

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Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
For giving to non-Christians.


 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
Largely for giving to inquiring non-Christians or young new Christians.

 **Concise Edition:** A look at the Bible’s teaching for new and young believers. For either new or young Christians. Suitable to give to non-Christian friends. Has study series based on it.




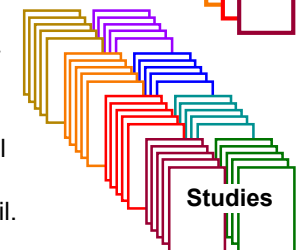
 **Foundations Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers consolidating their faith. For newer Christians. Study series is ideal for studies with newer believers.




 **Intermediate Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers growing in the faith. For developing a sound understanding of the faith. Studies are excellent for Bible study groups.



 **Comprehensive Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers established in the faith. For a comprehensive knowledge of the faith. Useful as a study or a devotional tool - and preparing talks. Studies are ideal for studying topics in detail.



 **In-Depth Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for teachers and students of the Bible. For Christians keen to gain a deep understanding of their faith. Useful for speakers preparing talks, study groups leaders, Bible students and Bible colleges. It is also in an electronic version, which is a PDF file.

Electronic Version

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. Being Right with God

- I. Getting Right with God
- II. Staying Right with God

22. Having Faith in God

- I. Faith and Hope
- II. What Not to Do

23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

- I. Loving and Fearing God
- II. Obeying God

24. Connecting with God

- I. Being Close to God
- II. Praying to God

25. Exalting God

- I. Instructions
- II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. Being One Body

- I. General
- II. Caring for the Body

27. Worshiping God

- I. General
- II. Offerings

28. Serving God

- I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
- II. Doing God's Work

29. Significant Practices

- I. Symbolic Rites
- II. Other Significant Practices

30. Church Leadership

- I. General
- II. Teaching in the Church

Part G. Relating to People

31. Love

- I. Loving Qualities
- II. Antitheses of Love

32. Justice

- I. Justice in Action
- II. Being True

33. Wisdom

- I. Being Wise
- II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

34. Common Relationships

- I. Family Relationships
- II. Civil Relationships

35. Spreading the Gospel

- I. Instructions
- II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Warfare

37. Rejecting Sin

- I. Encountering Sin
- II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

38. Major Pitfalls

- I. Pride
- II. Riches and Sex

39. Hard Times

- I. General
- II. Praying in Hard Times

40. Persecution

- I. The Persecution of God's People
- II. What to Do in Persecution

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Paul Mallison

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

- I. Basics
- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

- I. Angels
- II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

- I. Basics
- II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

- I. The Messiah's Identity
- II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

- I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
- II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

- I. Salvation from Sin
- II. Salvation for the World

14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
- II. Key Elements of the New Order

15. 'The Last Things'

- I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
- II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

- I. Belonging to God
- II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

- I. Basics
- II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

a) God's People Face Persecution

Following God and Jesus Christ results in persecution . . .

2TIM 3:12 *Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

JOHN 16:2–4A [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *People will put you out of their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering service to God. ³They will do this because they have not known the Father and they have not known me. ⁴I have told you these things now so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.* NCV™

. . . As such, it brings all kinds of hardships and suffering

ACTS 14:22B *“We must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God.”* ISV

1PET 1:6 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.*

Similarly, spreading the gospel can lead to opposition . . .

1THES 2:2 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] *But although we suffered earlier and were mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of much opposition.*

. . . and so spreading the gospel can result in persecution

ACTS 5:40A *They called the apostles in, beat them, and told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again.* NCV™

2TIM 1:8, [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, a prisoner for his sake, but by God's power accept your share of suffering for the gospel.*

God's people are in fact hated . . .

JOHN 15:18–19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it*

What are some other blessings of enduring persecution that Christians experience in this present life (either during the persecution or afterwards)?

Choose a blessing that you particularly value. Say why you chose it.

Along with encouraging faithfulness in persecution, how else can bearing in mind these blessings of the afterlife help us?

I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us.

Other blessings in the afterlife . . .

REV 7:14B–17 [A HEAVENLY ELDER, EXPLAINING TO JOHN WHO WERE THE PEOPLE WEARING WHITE ROBES IN JOHN’S VISION:] *“These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! ¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶They will never go hungry or be thirsty again, and the sun will not beat down on them, nor any burning heat, ¹⁷because the Lamb in the middle of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

. . . Blessings for one “who conquers”

REV 3:4–5 [JESUS CHRIST, THE CHURCH IN SARDIS:] *But you have a few individuals in Sardis who have not stained their clothes, and they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy. ⁵The one who conquers will be dressed like them in white clothing, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will declare his name before my Father and before his angels.*

Being dressed in white (vv. 4b–5a) signifies purity and quite possibly also the glorified state of the righteous.

REV 21:7 [GOD:] *The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*

The believer who conquers or overcomes all the opposition and difficulties they face in striving to be faithful to God, will inherit all the blessings of the new Jerusalem (cf. vv. 1–6).

would love you as it loves its own. But *I have chosen you out of the world, so you don’t belong to it. That is why the world hates you.*

NCV™

. . . and God’s people are plotted against

ACTS 20:19 [PAUL:] *I humbly served the Lord, often with tears in my eyes. I served the Lord during the difficult times I went through when the Jews plotted against me.* GW

What kinds of persecution, if any, have you faced because of your faith?

Why does following God and Jesus Christ result in persecution?

Think of a situation that you could encounter in which spreading the gospel could lead to opposition. (Perhaps you can think of a situation that you have actually encountered.) Is there anything you could do to adapt your approach to more effectively – and still faithfully – spread/tell the gospel?

b) Types of Persecution

Ridicule . . .

JER 20:7B–8 [JEREMIAH:] *Everyone ridicules me. ⁸For whenever I prophesy, I must cry out, “Violence and destruction are coming!” This message from the LORD has made me an object of continual insults and derision.*

. . . and verbal abuse

ACTS 18:6 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to object to the statements made by Paul and *even to abuse him.* ISV

Lies and slander

MATT 5:11 [JESUS:] God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and *tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me.* CEV

Ostracism and expulsion

LUKE 6:22 Blessed are you when people hate you, and when *they exclude you and insult you and reject you as evil on account of the Son of Man!*

ACTS 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, *raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.* NKJV

Imprisonment

ACTS 8:3 But Saul was trying to destroy the church; entering one house after another, *he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

d) Epilogue: Blessings for Faithfulness in Persecution

(⇒ *Rejoice because trials develop Christian character and virtues, p. 22*)

Blessings amidst suffering

2COR 1:3–5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. ⁴*He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us.* ⁵*We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ.* NCV™

2COR 4:11 *Throughout our lives we are always in danger of death for Jesus’ sake, in order that his life may be seen in this mortal body of ours.* GNT

Jesus’ “life” refers to his resurrection life – with its spiritual power for those who share in his suffering, suffering on his behalf.

God’s kingdom

MATT 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.*

Note that this teaching probably has both a present and a future application.

Eternal life

LUKE 21:19 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *By your endurance you will gain your lives.*

JAMES 1:12 *Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him.*

GNT

Future glory

ROM 8:17–18 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And if [we are] children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – *if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.* ¹⁸*For*

Why should we rejoice in persecution and difficulties?

How could Paul always be rejoicing amidst “much sadness” (2Cor 6:10a)?

How could you bring yourself to rejoice in such circumstances?

Beatings and violence

ACTS 22:19 [PAUL:] I replied, ‘Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and *beat those in the various synagogues who believed in you.*

HEB 11:35B But *others were tortured, not accepting release, to obtain resurrection to a better life.*

Threat of death . . .

ACTS 9:1 Meanwhile *Saul, still breathing out threats to murder the Lord’s disciples, went to the high priest . . .*

. . . and even death

ACTS 22:4A [PAUL:] I made trouble for everyone who followed the Lord’s Way, and *I even had some of them killed.* CEV

How should the change in Saul's/Paul's life – with him once being the main persecutor of the church – influence the way we see and relate to persecutors?

On occasions in some countries Christians are tortured (cf. Heb 11:35b) to sign a statement recanting their faith. Do such statements signed under such duress count for anything? If so, what are the implications of such an action for a Christian and what could they subsequently do?

Believers in some countries face many of the types of persecution listed here. What obligations do we have to them as fellow believers? How can we support them?

Jesus Christ is indicative of being accepted by them – a thought that the apostles may have also had in mind.

1PET 1:3–6 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! *By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ⁴*that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵*who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* ⁶*This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.*

“This” (v. 6) certainly refers to the contents of vv. 3b–4; that which is in v. 5 may also be encompassed. These things give great reason for joy – and so to rejoice – even during suffering in trials (v. 6).

Further examples of rejoicing during persecution and difficulties

2COR 6:10A [PAUL:] *We have much sadness, but we are always rejoicing.* NCV™

2COR 8:2 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES:] *In spite of a terrible ordeal of suffering, their abundant joy, along with their deep poverty, has resulted in the abundance of their generosity.* ISV

c) Rejoice

Rejoice because trials develop Christian character and virtues

ROM 5:3–4 [PAUL:] Not only this, but *we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance, character, and character, hope.*

JAMES 1:2–4 My brothers and sisters, *consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.*

Rejoice because of rewards for suffering and enduring persecution . . .

LUKE 6:22–23 *Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you and insult you and reject you as evil on account of the Son of Man! ²³Rejoice in that day, and jump for joy, because your reward is great in heaven.* For their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.

. . . and look forward to these rewards

2COR 4:17–18 [PAUL:] *And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. ¹⁸For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen.* What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever. GNT

Other reasons to rejoice in persecution and difficulties

ACTS 5:40–41 After calling in the apostles and beating them, they ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus and let them go. ⁴¹They left the Council, *rejoicing to have been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the Name.* ESV

The apostles rejoiced in part because they considered it to be an honor to suffer for “the name” of Jesus Christ (cf. NCV, NIV; 1Pet 4:16). Furthermore, being “considered worthy” by God and/or

c) The Antichrist and the Final Persecution

The Bible speaks of a figure of the end times that is opposed to God and Jesus Christ, and persecutes their people – a final “antichrist”. The first “beast” in Revelation is correlated by many with such a figure. However others consider it and the second beast that supports it to represent evil world systems rather than individual persons.

Scripture speaks of the coming of an antichrist

2THES 2:3B *Then before the Lord returns, the wicked one who is doomed to be destroyed will appear.* CEV

1JN 2:18 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that *the antichrist is coming*, so now many antichrists have appeared. We know from this that it is the last hour.

The final antichrist will be preceded by many others who are anti-Christ – “now many antichrists have appeared”. False teachers could be primarily in view, but the designation is applicable at least to some degree to anyone who actively denies that Jesus is the Christ.

The antichrist will be of Satan and opposed to God

2THES 2:9–10 *The arrival of the lawless one will be by Satan’s working with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰and with every kind of evil deception* directed against those who are perishing, because they found no place in their hearts for the truth so as to be saved.

DAN 11:36A *And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods.* ESV

Here “the king” is understood by many to represent the antichrist, as with “the lawless one” in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 above.

The antichrist will have great authority and be worshiped

REV 13:7B–8 *He [the beast] was given ruling authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation, ⁸and all those who live on the*

earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed.

Persecution of God’s people will increase in the end times – especially due to the antichrist . . .

MATT 24:9 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name.*

REV 13:7A *The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them.*

. . . Martyrdom will be prominent

REV 13:15 The second beast was empowered to give life to the image of the first beast so that it could speak, and could *cause all those who did not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

“Three and a half years” is given for the rule of the antichrist and intense persecution

DAN 7:25 *He will speak against the Supreme God and oppress God’s people. He will try to change their religious laws and festivals, and God’s people will be under his power for three and a half years.* GNT

In regard to the duration of the antichrist’s rule and the future period of intense persecution of believers, the Bible speaks of periods of time which are equivalent to three and a half years. Whether or not this is a literal three and half years, such specifications are indicative of the period being predetermined by God.

The end of the antichrist

REV 19:19–20 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to do battle with the one who rode the horse and with his army. ²⁰Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf – signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.*

How do faith and hope inspire endurance (cf. 1 Thes 1:3; 2 Thes 1:4)?

Why should we not fear or worry when facing persecution?

What attitude and actions should be part of our response to those who persecute us?

Father's will. ³⁰Even all the hairs on your head are numbered. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

REV 2:10 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS:] *Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer.* The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself.

Do not worry about what to say – you will be given what to say

MATT 10:18–20 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] You will be brought before governors and kings because of me, to testify to them and to the gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, *don't worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, because in that hour what you are to say will be given to you.* ²⁰*It won't be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* ISV

Pray to God, asking for help

ACTS 4:29–30 [THE EARLY BELIEVERS:] *And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage, ³⁰while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*

Note that the believers' prayer was for God to work through them amidst persecution, rather than simply for God to stop the persecution.

Bless and pray for those who persecute you

MATT 5:44–45 But I say to you, Love your enemies and *pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.* For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ESV

1COR 4:12B [PAUL:] *When we are verbally abused, we respond with a blessing, when persecuted, we endure, ...*

Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur.

In v. 19, "the one who rode the horse" is Jesus Christ, returning with his army of angels.

The outcome of submitting to the antichrist

REV 14:9–11 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] A third angel followed the first two, declaring in a loud voice: *"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and takes the mark [of the beast] on his forehead or his hand, ¹⁰that person will also drink of the wine of God's anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night, along with anyone who receives the mark of his name."*

What is your understanding of the concept of an antichrist of the end times?

If such an antichrist appears in your life time, how do you think you will respond? How should Christians respond?

What points should Christians bear in mind from the teachings of this section, even in facing persecution in the present?

b) Have Faith in God and Pray

Have faith and hope in God . . .

DAN 3:17, 28 [SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, TO KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR:] Your majesty, if it be his will, *our God whom we serve can deliver us from the blazing fire furnace, and he will deliver us from you. . . .*²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! *He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him.* They disobeyed the king’s command and were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ISV

2COR 1:8–11 [PAUL:] For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But *that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. *On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.* ESV

. . . Faith and hope enable one to endure persecution and suffering

1THES 1:3B [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] And we thank him [God] that *you continue to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* NCV™

2THES 1:4 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] That’s why we brag in God’s churches about *your endurance and faith in all the persecutions and suffering you are experiencing.* GW

The coupling of “endurance and faith” suggests that faith goes hand in hand with endurance.

Do not be afraid of persecutors or suffering

MATT 10:28–31 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.* Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.²⁹ *Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your*

What is one thing that you need to keep in mind anytime that you experience persecution?

How should knowing that we are sharing in Christ's sufferings help us in persecution?

In what kinds of situations should we avoid persecution and in what kinds do we need to face it in order to remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ?

d) God's Care of Persecuted Believers

God's all-surpassing purpose, work and love for his people – despite adversity

ROM 8:28–31, 35–39 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,*²⁹ *because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.*³¹ *What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...*³⁵ *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*³⁶ *As it is written, "For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*³⁷ *No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!*³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers,*³⁹ *nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The phrase "all things" (v. 28) probably primarily has in view adverse experiences, in particular persecution (cf. v. 18). In vv. 29–30 Paul proceeds to look beyond any suffering to the purpose and work of God for the believer that overshadows all difficulties we might experience in this life. Verse 31 is implying that if God is for us – as is emphatically shown (vv. 28–30) – there is no one (and no thing) of comparable significance that can be against us.

God and Jesus Christ strengthen their people amidst trials

2TIM 1:8B [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Instead, take your part in suffering for the Good News, as God gives you the strength to do it.* GNT

2COR 12:9B–10 [CHRIST, TO PAUL:] *"My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* [PAUL:] *So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.*¹⁰ *Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults,*

with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

In weakness, hardship and/or persecution (v. 10a) Christ's power was perfected in Paul (v. 9). As such Paul could then say: "I am strong" (v. 10b).

God and Jesus Christ will rescue their people from trials, . . .

JER 15:20–21 [GOD, TO JEREMIAH:] I will make you as strong as a wall to these people, a fortified wall of bronze. *They will attack you, but they will not be able to overcome you. For I will be with you to rescue you and deliver you,*” says the LORD. ²¹“I will deliver you from the power of the wicked. I will free you from the clutches of violent people.”

2TIM 4:18 [PAUL:] *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen. ISV

In light of vv. 6–8, which indicate that his death was near, it appears that Paul is not referring here to a physical rescue but a spiritual one – where Christ would bring him “safely to his heavenly kingdom”.

. . . as indeed they have rescued believers in the past

DAN 3:28 The king said, “Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! *He sent his angel and rescued these men who serve and trust him.* They disobeyed my orders and risked their lives rather than bow down and worship any god except their own. GNT

2TIM 3:11B [PAUL:] *I endured these persecutions and the Lord delivered me from them all.*

God will ultimately save believers from the persecution of the end times

DAN 7:21–22 [DANIEL, DESCRIBING A VISION:] While I was watching, *that horn began to wage war against the holy ones and was defeating them,* ²²*until the Ancient of Days arrived and judgment was rendered in favor of the holy ones of the Most High. Then the time came for the holy ones to take possession of the kingdom.*

The “horn” is understood by many to represent the antichrist.

Consider and follow Jesus Christ's example in suffering . . .

HEB 12:2–3 *Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne.* ³*Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up.* GNT

. . . and share in Jesus Christ's sufferings

1PET 4:13 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] But be happy that *you are sharing in Christ's sufferings* so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. NCV™

It was necessary for Christ to suffer in order to achieve God's objectives for him. Likewise those who are “in” him, being a part of his body (the church), must also be prepared to suffer in order to advance his cause. Quite possibly the NT writers had such a concept in mind when they wrote of sharing in Christ's sufferings.

Note: Be on your guard against persecutors and avoid persecution when appropriate

MATT 10:16–17 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *I am sending you out like sheep surrounded by wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.* ¹⁷*Beware of people, because they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.*

MATT 10:23A [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Whenever they persecute you in one place, flee to another.*

We are to be faithful to God in what we do even if it means that we will draw persecution. Having said this, verses such as this one suggest that it is appropriate to avoid persecution when doing so does not involve being unfaithful. Verses 16–17 above also suggest this.

a) Be Faithful to God and Endure

Remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ . . .

REV 2:10, 13 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM:] Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. *Remain faithful even to the point of death*, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. . . . ¹³I know where you live – where Satan’s throne is. *Yet you continue to cling to my name and you have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your city where Satan lives.*

The clause “where Satan’s throne is” (v. 13a) apparently refers to the city of Pergamum as a center of pagan worship, no doubt a hostile place to Christians. Note Antipas’s example (v. 13b) of being faithful “even to the point of death” (v. 10b).

. . . and so continue to do what God wants

1PET 4:19 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Those who suffer because that is God’s will for them must entrust themselves to a faithful creator and *continue to do what is good.* GW

Endure persecution and suffering . . .

1COR 4:12B [PAUL:] *When people persecute us, we endure it.* GW

REV 13:10 [JOHN:] Whoever is meant to be captured will surely be captured; whoever is meant to be killed by the sword will surely be killed by the sword. *This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God’s people.* GNT

. . . Endure patiently

REV 2:3 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS:] I know *you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.* ESV

Note: God will take vengeance on those who persecute his people

2THES 1:6–7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God will do what is right: he will bring suffering on those who make you suffer,⁷ and he will give relief to you who suffer and to us as well. He will do this when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, . . .* GNT

REV 6:9–11 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Now when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given. ¹⁰They cried out with a loud voice, “*How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?*” ¹¹Each of them was given a long white robe and *they were told to rest for a little longer*, until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been.

Choose a verse from the Romans 8 passages (*God's all-surpassing purpose, work and love for his people – despite adversity*) that you find particularly striking or encouraging. How would you use it or find it helpful when facing persecution?

How does God strengthen his people amidst trials?

The Bible indicates that many Christians would and will be killed because of their faith. How can we reconcile such verses with ones that speak of God rescuing his people?

II. What to Do in Persecution

The Bible provides practical teaching on what to do when faced with persecution. Moreover, the Bible even provides good reasons to rejoice in spite of the suffering often involved in persecution. Not least of these reasons are the blessings that we can experience amidst such hardship – and those that we will receive in the future for enduring it.