

Blessings for Faithfulness in Persecution

Blessings amidst suffering

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.* 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–5 NCV™

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.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:11 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

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

Note that this teaching probably has a present application as well as a future one.

Eternal life

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. JAMES 1:12 GNT

Future glory

[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 I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us.* ROMANS 8:17–18

40. Persecution

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I. The Persecution of God's People

The Bible warns that faithfully following God inevitably results in persecution and difficulties. In fact in a number of countries today severe persecution of Christians is common. Additionally, the Bible speaks of a time just prior to Jesus Christ's return when persecution will be severe worldwide. But along with such warnings, the Bible gives wonderful and powerful promises of God's care for his people in the face of persecution.

The Reality of Persecution

Following God and Jesus Christ results in persecution . . .

Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ² [TIMOTHY 3:12](#)

[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.* [JOHN 16:2–4A](#) NCV™

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

“We must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God.” [ACTS 14:22B](#) ISV

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

Similarly, spreading the gospel can result in suffering

[PAUL:] *For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher. ¹²Because of this, in fact, I suffer as I do.* ² [TIMOTHY 1:11–12A](#)

God's people are in fact hated

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

you are to say, because in that hour what you are to say will be given to you. ²⁰It won't be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. [MATTHEW 10:18–20](#) ISV

Pray to God, asking for help

[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.* [ACTS 4:29–30](#)

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

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. [LUKE 6:27–28](#)

Rejoice

Rejoice because trials develop Christian character and virtues

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

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.* [JAMES 1:2–4](#)

Rejoice because of rewards for enduring persecution

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. [LUKE 6:22–23](#)

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.* [HEBREWS 12:2–3 GNT](#)

. . . and share in Jesus Christ's sufferings

[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. [1 PETER 4:13 NCV™](#)

It was necessary for Christ to suffer in order to achieve God's objectives for him. Likewise those who are "in" him, 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.

Have Faith in God and Pray

Have faith and hope in God

[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. ⁹Indeed, 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.* ¹⁰He 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.* [2 CORINTHIANS 1:8–11 ESV](#)

Do not be afraid

[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 Father's will.* ³⁰*Even all the hairs on your head are numbered.* ³¹*So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.* [MATTHEW 10:28–31](#)

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

[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*

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.

The antichrist will have great authority and be worshiped

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. [REVELATION 13:7B–8](#)

This is speaking of the first "beast" of Revelation.

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

[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.* [MATTHEW 24:9](#)

The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them. [REVELATION 13:7A](#)

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

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. [DANIEL 7:25 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 literal, such specifications are indicative of the period being predetermined by God. The period will end on Jesus Christ's return, when the two beasts will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (cf. Revelation 19:19–20).

God's Care of Persecuted Believers

God strengthens his people amidst trials

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

[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.* 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9B–10

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 rescues his people from trials

[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.”* JEREMIAH 15:20–21

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

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

[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.* DANIEL 7:21–22

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

Remember the persecuted

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.

Be Faithful to God and Endure

Remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ

[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.* REVELATION 2:10, 13

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).

Endure persecution

[JOHN:] If anyone is meant for captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed by the sword, then by the sword he must be killed. *This requires steadfast endurance* and faith from the saints. REVELATION 13:10

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

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