

The SBJT Forum

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he is “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). He is “the prince of the power of the air.” Paul says that there are “spiritual forces of evil” (Eph 6:12) that oppose us.

Satan attempts to destroy the church through persecution or by false teaching. But he is a defeated enemy. John teaches that he is expelled from heaven and thrown to the earth (Rev 12:8-9). But when did this battle with Michael take place? John isn’t talking here about the original fall of Satan when he first rebelled against God. Nor is John talking about Satan being evicted from heaven sometime in the future. The key to interpreting Michael’s victory is found in vv. 10-11. “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.’” Michael didn’t triumph over the devil in his own strength. He cast him out of heaven because of the death of Christ, because of the victory won at the cross.

This fits with what John says elsewhere. As Jesus contemplates going to the

SBJT: What does Revelation 12 teach us about the cross of Christ and persecution?

Thomas R. Schreiner: Revelation 12 teaches us that the church faces persecution because of our great adversary the devil. In v. 7 we read about a great war in heaven between Michael, the archangel, and Satan. Michael defeated Satan, and he was expelled from heaven. Verse 9 reminds us of how great that victory is: For our opponent is the devil—the one who slanders us before God. He is Satan (our adversary). He is the one who deceives the whole world. As 1 John says “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Or, as the gospel of John

cross in John 12:31 he says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” John doesn’t say anything different from what we find in his gospel. The devil has been cast down because he has been defeated at the cross. Michael wins the victory because of what Jesus has done at Calvary. And that means that the accuser of the brethren has now been expelled from heaven. That doesn’t mean that Satan has quit accusing us, but his accusations have no basis.

Even though we are not perfect as Christians, we are marked by faithfulness, even when we are persecuted. Those who are saved are those who have not loved their lives unto death. The power of Satan has been broken in our lives if we freely give ourselves to the Lord, and are willing to die for the sake of the gospel. This is one evidence and sign that we have been truly redeemed by the blood of the lamb. We are not perfected but we have a new direction in our lives, so that we are willing to suffer for the Lord.

There is great joy in heaven, according to v. 12, for Satan has been expelled and defeated, but life on earth will be a challenge and difficult, for the devil has come to the earth, knowing that his time is short. The short time refers to the entire period from the resurrection of Christ to his second coming. The devil has been cast down the earth by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and now he knows his time is short. He knows he is a defeated enemy.

When Satan saw that he had been defeated at the cross and no longer had access to heaven, he was enraged. He knows his time is short. He knows he is going to lose. But he fights anyway. After all, the devil is ultimately insane. He is self-destructive. And the one thing he wants to do is to destroy the woman—the people of God. And so with insane fury he attacks and persecutes the church. We may lose our lives or be discriminated against in employment or suffer financially because of our adherence to the gospel.

Still, the woman (the church of Jesus Christ) is protected by the Lord. She is given the two wings of an eagle and flees to the wilderness. We are reminded of Exodus 19:3, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” The church isn’t in the garden of Eden or in the heavenly city but in the wilderness. She is there for a time, times, and half a time, and I would argue that this refers to the time from the resurrection of Christ to the second coming—to the time when Satan was expelled from heaven at the cross until Jesus comes again.

But even though the church is in the wilderness and life is tough, she is nourished and protected by God himself. The devil is enraged and water pours from his mouth to engulf the woman, but the earth opens its mouth, so that she is not drowned. I think it is quite obvious that John doesn’t have in mind a literal flood

here. He would be quite surprised to find out that anyone would think that water coming out of a serpent's mouth was interpreted literally. The point is deeper than that. Satan tries to destroy the church with a flood of lies, persecution, and false teaching.

What Revelation teaches us is that it is God who protects the church from falling astray. The devil spews forth his filth and lies and hatred, but the church resists and resists and resists. And the glory of her triumph shines all the brighter because she resists the allurements of Satan.

The church's preservation in the wilderness redounds to the glory of God. For how can anyone stand in the midst of such difficulties? Only by the grace of God. Only through the power of the cross. It is no great virtue to stand when we are in the majority, but to stand when we are in the minority and when we are unpopular and when we are persecuted, that is a testimony to the grace of God. We can look around and get depressed as we see the state of the world. But John tells us: Be encouraged. Even though you are in the wilderness, you will triumph. You will make it to the heavenly city. As Jesus said, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:19-20).

Life on earth is a battle, but we must not be pessimistic or defeatist. We are to be full of optimism, not because we are strong but because we have won the final victory through the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not need to fear the devil or demons or disease or death. We are more than conquerors through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Dr. Morgan has authored *Jonathan Edwards and Hell* (Mentor, 2004) and *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People* (P&R, 2010), and he has co-edited with Robert A. Peterson numerous works such as *Hell under Fire* (Zondervan, 2004), *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (InterVarsity, 2008), *Suffering and the Goodness of God* (Crossway, 2008), *The Glory of God* (Crossway, 2010), *The Deity of Christ* (Crossway, 2011), *The Kingdom of God* (Crossway, 2012), *Sin* (Crossway, 2013), and *Heaven* (Crossway, 2014)

SBJT: We often don't think of Hell and final judgment as a comforting thought but how does Scripture speak of these realities to comfort persecuted Christians?

Christopher W. Morgan: For many evangelicals hell is anything but comforting. Instead the historic doctrine of hell carries baggage, filled with disconcerting questions related to God's love, justice,

and victory. It is as if hell magnifies all our questions of theodicy. Can God really be just to punish people this way? Would a loving God really send nice people to hell? Doesn't hell mar God's ultimate victory? In the eyes of many, hell is deemed an emotional, even moral problem.

There is a sense in which we sympathize with these concerns. In a very real sense, hell is tragic, because sin is tragic. We are rightly repulsed by people who angrily and gleefully wave banners such as "You're going to hell!" as weapons in their cultural wars. No, we do not want people to go to hell, we are grieved at the prospect, and we pray, minister, give, and witness in hopes that people will come to Christ for salvation, glorifying God as worshippers of Jesus. We find such a burden for unbelievers to be appropriate and requisite in light of Paul's own experience and teachings in Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1.

But what is striking is how rarely we contemplate what the Bible itself stresses about hell—that hell is *just*. For example, one well known evangelical wrote, "The ultimate horror of God's universe is hell." While hell is in one sense tragic, it is not the ultimate horror in God's universe—sin is. Hell is the just punishment; sin is the treasonous crime.

Far from displaying our current moral angst, the Bible routinely portrays hell as right, just, and an aspect of God's final victory. Even more, *the Bible regularly instructs about hell in order to comfort God's people, particularly those undergoing severe persecution.*

Hell is presented as a place where people suffer the just penalty for their crimes. Hell as just punishment is taught by every New Testament author: Mark (9:42-48); Matthew (5:20-30; 24-25); Luke (16:19-31); Paul (2 Thess. 1:5-10); the author of Hebrews (10:27-31); James (4:12; 5:1-5); Peter (2 Pet. 2:4-17); Jude (13-23); and John (Rev. 20:10-15). And hell often functions as a comfort God's persecuted people.

One clear example is 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. We may find it startling that Paul here encourages the persecuted saints with the doctrine of hell:

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on

the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

Paul comforts these believers by emphasizing the just judgment of God: “God’s judgment is right” ... “God is just: he will pay back trouble for those that trouble you.” ... “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished.” Thus, these persecuted Christians can find hope in God’s retributive and vindicating judgment.

Another example is James 5:1-6. Like an Old Testament prophet, James castigates the rich landowners who have exploited God’s people. James vividly declares that the rich oppressors should weep and wail because God’s judgment is coming upon them. And it will be severe, marked by misery and suffering. The corrosion of the exploiters’ wealth will serve as a witness against them, and the wages they failed to pay their workers will testify against them. By living in luxury and self-indulgence while their workers virtually starved, the oppressors increased their punishment at the last judgment. In light of this judgment, God’s people, the righteous poor, find comfort, are to be patient, and are not to grumble against each other, knowing they too will be judged (5:7–11). James dramatically portrays the withheld wages’ shrieking cry, followed by the cry of the harvesters themselves. But who hears these cries? Not the wicked landowners who are too self-indulgent to care (5:5). Not the corrupt justice system that carries the favor of the wealthy. Is anyone listening to these cries? Yes, God himself—the omnipotent Lord of armies—he hears these cries and will come to the rescue, avenging his people and bringing eschatological punishment. Just as Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, James points to God’s eschatological judgment upon the wicked in order to comfort and give hope to the persecuted believers.

The doctrine of hell functions similarly in Revelation, which was written in a context of persecution. Revelation urges believers to worship God alone, persevere in the faith, and await God’s ultimate victory, which includes his future judgment of the wicked and serves a source of hope and comfort. Revelation 6:10 depicts the cries of the persecuted, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge and avenge our blood ?” Far from finding divine judgment or hell disconcerting, the persecuted long for God’s vengeance and pray for it. Their angst centers on questions related to God’s patience, not his holy wrath. So Revelation likewise urges the worship of God, fosters perseverance, and offers comfort to the perse-

cuted church by pointing to God's temporal as well as eschatological judgment upon his enemies (see 11:15-18; 14:6-13; 16:5-7; 19:1-8; 20:10-15; 21:7-8; 22:10-15).

Such biblical texts unsettle us and disrupt our contemporary sensibilities, but they serve as important reminders of enduring biblical truths. In this present age, justice is hard to come by. But there is a day coming when justice will prevail. In the end, God's victory will be complete, his reign total, and his peace and justice firmly established. Everyone on God's side will share in his victory, everyone opposing him and his people will be brought down.

For these biblical writers, God's just judgment does not create moral problems but profoundly settles them. Hell reassures believers that evil loses, God wins, and that as God's people, they win, too. When believers are experiencing the all too real pain of oppression in the current evil age, these truths are not disconcerting but sources of comfort, signposts for hope. Such persecuted Christians can have confidence that though they suffer now, their pain does not have the last word. And their persecutors do not have the last word. The last word belongs to God—the God who is ever present with his people in the midst of the persecution, and the God who is coming to judge his enemies and vindicate his people.

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SBJT: Why is it important for Pastor's to preach on the topic of suffering and persecution?

Greg Gilbert: I remember hearing a preacher explain once that he preached so often about suffering from the pulpit so that he could sit quietly with his sheep as they lay in the ICU. What he meant was that he wanted to teach his people a theology of suffering before it actually came to them, so that when it did, they would already have the resources neces-

sary to face it with solidity and faithfulness. Part of the way we as pastors teach the Christians under our care about suffering is in the very way we teach them to pray.

You've probably noticed that when the time comes for Christians to pray for those who are suffering, the most common prayer is simply that God would make the suffering stop. Heal the sickness, make the cancer disap-

pear, solve the problem, and take the hardship away. That's actually a really good place to start, I think. When we pray, it is good for us to come before God and make specific requests of him, yet always to do so with a heart that acknowledges his sovereignty and infinite goodness and wisdom. When I lead my church in prayer for people suffering, I'll often pray something like, "God, we know that you are perfectly good and powerful and wise, and so we trust you to do what is best in this situation. But you also invite us to come before your throne with confidence and to make our requests known to you, and so even recognizing our own finitude and smallness, what we want, O God, and what we ask of you, is that you heal this sickness. Do it so that this sister may be a witness to your greatness; do it so that your Son's name might be glorified. This is what we ask, O Lord, and yet we do so with hearts that are bowed before your throne, trusting that even if you determine *not* to do what we ask, whatever you do is right and best."

Praying specifically and boldly, I think, is a powerful statement of our trust in God even in the midst of the crushing circumstances we face in this fallen world. But is there more we can pray for those who are suffering than simply that their suffering will be taken away? Yes, and the answer to that question comes from recognizing God's purposes for us in our suffering, and then voicing those purposes back to him in prayer. For example, we know from Scripture that God intends our suffering to produce perseverance, so pray that a suffering person might know the power of the Holy Spirit to persevere with faithfulness. Pray that their perseverance might cause them to find joy in the hope of eternity, and pray that through their perseverance, they might grow in reliance on and love for Jesus. We know for a fact from Scripture that God does not allow suffering in our lives for no reason; he always has a purpose for it. Teach your people, even in prayer, about those purposes and ask God to do what he has already promised to do.

We also know from the Bible that God uses our suffering to bring glory to Jesus, because suffering tends to bring us to the end of our reliance on ourselves and our own abilities, and cast us bankrupt at the feet of Jesus. That's what happened to Paul when he prayed that God would remove his "thorn in the flesh." God declined to do so, and told Paul why: "My grace is sufficient for you." In other words, Paul, don't think that strength and comfort and joy will ultimately be found in the absence of suffering; they are found in Me, regardless of your circumstances. I am greater than your pain.

Recognizing that, pray that Jesus might be glorified as a suffering person learns more and more to rely on him, to find joy and comfort in him. As you do, your people will eventually understand that it is ultimately God's glory-

--not their own comfort---that ought to be their aim. And then, ironically but wonderfully, they will find that as their minds are transformed to seek his glory in all circumstances rather than their own comfort, they will find the greatest joy and deepest comfort of all, because they will find it in Him.

Our prayers---especially in the midst of suffering---are a both a powerful witness to our faith in God and a powerful teacher to us a Christians. Commit as a pastor or a church leader not to let your prayers for suffering people, or your church's prayers for them, be shallow and insignificant. When you pray, press into the deep things of God. Uncover his purposes, express faith, and lean into the hope our faith in Jesus Christ provides.

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The author of many articles, Dr. Gentry is currently editing *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* for the Göttingen Septuagint Series, is co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012), and he provides leadership for the Hexapla Institute.

suffer because others mistreat them; (3) persons who are just or righteous (in the eyes of God) may suffer for doing what is right.

The covenants inaugurated by God between himself and human parties form the key to the plot-structure of the Bible as a single and unified text. We can briefly survey conditions established by each of the covenants and assess the kinds of suffering discussed or observed in these portions of the plot-structure.

Genesis 1:26-28 establishes a covenant between God and humans on the one hand and between humans and the creation on the other. Adam was called to be an obedient son in relation to God and a servant priest-king in relation to the earth and the creatures living there. When Adam and Eve violated the covenant relationship with God, relations between humans and

SBJT: Is there a difference between suffering under the Old Covenant versus under the New Covenant?

Peter J. Gentry: That question is an important one to ask so let's briefly consider it for a few moments as we consider and explore continuities and discontinuities between living under the Old Covenant versus the New.

Scripture clearly distinguishes at least three types of suffering: (1) all humans suffer because (a) we live in a fallen world and in addition (b) our own wrongdoings bring consequences in our lives and in our world; (2) innocent people may suffer

between humans and the earth broke down quickly. Cain in anger murdered his brother and Abel suffered. Certainly Abel suffered as an innocent person, and possibly on account of his righteousness. Seven generations later in the descendants of Cain, Lamech murders a boy for merely striking him.

Genesis 3:8-19 demonstrates that God subjected the creation to frustration on account of human sin (Rom 8:20). Corruption and social violence increased to a breaking point in the eyes of God (Gen 6:11-13) so that he brought further judgement in the form of a flood. Again we have suffering in the form of humans wronging other humans and humans subject to divine judgement.

The Covenant with Noah reaffirmed the original Covenant with Creation, but did not change the human heart (Gen 8:21) so that immediately afterwards suffering continues in the drunkenness of Noah and the uncovering of his nakedness by Ham—humans wronging other humans.

After divine judgement destroys human unity at Babel God focuses on one person, i.e., Abraham, and his descendants as a means of blessing or cursing in relation to all the nations (Gen 12:1-3). This introduces a new perspective on suffering: an individual or nation may suffer ill for the way they treat the family of Abraham. We can see this in relation to Pharaoh when Abram sojourns there and Pharaoh takes Sarah as his wife. Later we see something similar, only much more magnified, when the Egyptians mistreat Israel for a long period of time and Yahweh brings his people out by executing judgements upon the Egyptian gods and people. God is true to his promises to Abraham.

Under the administration of the Abrahamic Covenant, Joseph is an example of a person who suffers either for doing right or in spite of doing right. His commitment to purity motivates Potiphar's wife to prevaricate and have him cast into prison. Abel and Joseph appear to be isolated instances whose suffering is not brought about by the covenant situation that governs their lives.

The Covenant with Israel mediated by Moses enables the nation to live in the land given to them by God and experience blessing by showing them how to have a right relationship to God, how to treat each other in truly human ways, and how to be good stewards of the earth's resources. Therefore the Mosaic Covenant administers the outworking of the promises to Abraham in the Iron Age culture and period.

With the Mosaic Covenant suffering becomes more severe in that increased revelation brings greater responsibility. Stephen Dempster notes: "A closer look at the text shows that Israel is treated differently after Sinai. Murmuring is not only judged; it is judged severely. No sooner does Israel leave

Sinai than the complaining of the people results in the divine fire of wrath burning the outskirts of the camp. A conflagration (Taberah Num. 11:1-3) quickly becomes a graveyard (Qibroth Hattaavah 11:34) as many are struck down by the divine wrath for craving meat while being tired of manna. Whereas pre-Sinai Sabbath violation leads to reprimand (Exod. 16:27-30), post-Sinai trespass leads to death (Num. 15:32-36). Israel succeeds against the Amalekites before Sinai (Exod. 17:8-16) but miserably fails after Sinai (Num. 14:41-44). At pre-Sinai Meribah (Exod. 17:1-7) Israel is rebuked; at post-Sinai Meribah (Num. 20:1-13), Moses and Aaron themselves are condemned to exile. Within the overall structure of the text there is thus a hermeneutic that points to the failure of Israel to keep the Sinai covenant and to the virtual inevitability of exile on these terms. The kingdom of Priests mediating creation blessing to the nations does not seem possible for this firstborn son. The sentence of exile that is passed on the great Moses, the one whose face shone with the glory of God, seems to make this point in dramatic fashion (*Dominion and Dynasty* [InterVarsity, 2003], 113).

Under the Old Covenant, then, one might think that full obedience would bring eternal life. The people experienced blessings and cursing in an earthly way: obedience would bring bodily health and strength, good marriages, full families, crops and herds that were successful, and victory over enemies; disobedience brought the reverse (Deut 28).

As Paul points out in Romans 5:12-14, people who lived before the Mosaic Covenant died because all humans are involved in Adam's sin in some way. Even at the very moment that the Mosaic Covenant was being inaugurated and mediated, the people violated it and the text points to the failure of Israel to keep it. So, again, as Paul notes, the Mosaic Covenant revealed sin for what it is (Rom 7:13) and did not remove the death penalty either. At the same time, penalties for sin under the Old Covenant were overlooked as God awaited the full propitiation wrought by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Rom 3:21-26). So people did not suffer for sins as much as they might have suffered.

In the section of the Jewish canon known as the Writings, there are reflections on the question of suffering. In the book of Job, for example, Job suffers because of the attack of the Adversary upon him. This suffering, however, is limited by the wager between God and the Adversary. Job's "Comforters" argue from the standard theology of the time that Job is being punished for his wickedness. This is not the case, but the reason for the suffering is hidden from Job and his comforters. Yahweh, the Covenant Lord, answers Job in a storm. He does not explain the reason for Job's trials but

he does demonstrate from Behemoth and Leviathan, symbols of the power of the Adversary within the poetic sections, that his power over creation is much greater than that of the Adversary, however great the power of evil may seem. Not all English translations make this clear, but Psalm 103:26 states that Leviathan is a mere plaything before Yahweh. Thus, according to the Book of Job, a person can suffer for other reasons unknown to us, but known to the heavenly council where the rule of God is supreme.

According to Ecclesiastes, life is beautiful, but as ephemeral as soap bubbles. There are many aspects of life that frustrate logic and reason in attempts to understand them: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve (8:14 NIV). He also affirms that “there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins” (7:20).

While Ecclesiastes and Job attempt to probe the problem of human suffering, the book of Proverbs is focused on the end results: rewards for the righteous and punishments for the wicked. Nonetheless, the book of Proverbs assumes that the righteous experience pain and poverty for a season. Reflect on these texts: (1) 13:23: “A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away;” (2) 16:8: “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice;” (3) 17:1: “Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife;” (4) 24:16: “for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” These proverbs show that the book assumes suffering is experienced by the righteous for a season, but it is not the focus of its teaching. Note also that the wicked do lay traps for innocent people and commit acts of social injustice against them (Prov 1:11).

A new stage in God’s dealings with Israel and the nations is reached in the Covenant made with David (2 Sam 7). First, a king of the line of David will have a kingdom and a throne forever. Second, this king will function as the covenant mediator in order to make sure the covenant is kept by the people, assuming he fulfills Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Third, the king stands as the covenant head of the nation. He will do for Israel as an individual what Israel has failed to do as a nation and be the instrument to bring the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant to the nations (2 Sam 7:19). Fourth, all nations must eventually receive instruction from this kingly line (Ps 2). This is what makes possible Isaiah’s Servant Songs, which show God’s solution for the problem of sin and suffering.

The prophecy in Daniel 7, enlarged upon in 8 and 10-12 has a bearing on our topic. Daniel 7 describes four human kingdoms followed by the king-

dom of God. The Son of Man in Daniel 7 represents the divine ruler, the human ruler, and the people of that kingdom. The depiction of this kingdom as a human (Aramaic, son of man), as opposed to an animal, symbolises the fact that only in this kingdom can one achieve what it means to be truly human. The main point in Daniel 7, however, is that the Son of Man, i.e., both leader and people, will enter this kingdom through suffering.

The important teaching in Daniel 7 is taken up by the apostles, the authorised agents of the New Covenant, promised by the prophets of the Old Testament and inaugurated via the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is both divine and human ruler of the Son of Man kingdom in Daniel 7. Although these texts may be familiar to us, they need to be cited to hear them afresh on this topic:

1 Peter 2:11-25: “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

1 Peter 4:1, 12-19: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves

also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin ... Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

2 Timothy 1:8-12: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."

2 Timothy 2:1-3: "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

2 Timothy 3:10-13: "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse..."

Peter distinguishes between suffering for doing wrong and suffering for

doing what is right or even suffering simply “according to the will of God.” If we suffer for doing what is right, we follow the model of Jesus, our Messiah. And in fact, we have been called to this model of suffering under administration of the New Covenant.

Paul supports this teaching in his instructions to Timothy. He is suffering as a messenger of the gospel and Timothy may expect exactly the same thing. Paul’s life is a model for Timothy. Persecution and suffering for doing what is right is part of the calling of the believer in the New Covenant community.

There is no teaching like this under the Old Covenant. Apart from sporadic cases, it is not the norm under the Old Covenant. It seems that there is a discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New in the matter of the question of suffering.