

THE BOOK OF REVELATION: HEALING COUNSELING FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

by

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And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,
and they did not love their lives to the death.

Revelation 12:11

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are
being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the
Lord.

2Corinthians 3:18

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Book of Revelation: Healing Counseling for Persecuted Christians

Chapter One gives an introduction to Christian persecution: its definition, sources, statistics, geographical hot spots, and the need for a special approach to counseling severely persecuted believers.

Chapter Two focuses on a brief overview of the history of severe persecution of followers of Jesus Christ from the 1st century after Christ to the present day. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the fact that persecution is an intrinsic heritage of disciples of Jesus Christ, and although we might experience freedom of religion and democracy under our present systems of government, we may never rule out the fact that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Timothy 3:12). To not be prepared to minister to persecuted believers is to not believe that the situation is real and critical.

Chapter Three focuses on an overview of clinical treatment and counseling available to survivors of severe persecution and highlights the clinical effects as well as the professional help available for people suffering from these effects. The question to answer is: “Is *additional* ministry for believers who suffer from severe persecution needed?”

Chapter Four deals with an overview of New Testament teaching on persecution – how believers are to act and react when they are being persecuted. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the unusual responses required of believers. Are these responses really possible, and if so, how?

Chapter Five examines the different interpretations of the book of Revelation, but more importantly it stresses the original purpose and hermeneutical purpose of the book. This chapter forms the first argument of the proposed counseling model.

Chapter Six concerns the first seven chapters of the book of Revelation with additional notes on chapters 8-22. This chapter is the second argument of the proposed counseling model. It explains how the unusual responses required of believers during persecution are possible. The chapter aims to identify the principles directed at counseling severely persecuted believers and will only endeavor to highlight these. It is not an attempt to explain or exegete the full scope of the book.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, focuses on the counseling model with specific comments on the *larger discursive framework* in creating meaning when counseling a believer under severe persecution. This chapter also focuses on special issues such as the believers witness in a hostile environment, dealing with betrayal and denial of one’s faith, dealing with offence at Christ, dealing with distortions in doctrine due to isolation, dealing with the lamb-dragon of the false church, and how to “see” Christ.

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- Haven Clark for proofreading, much needed technical advice, and a shared love for the Book of Revelation

TECHNICAL PREFACE

Throughout this text, direct quotations from the Bible in English are taken from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) unless otherwise indicated.

The text of the New Testament is that of the Nestlé Aland 27th edition of *The Greek New Testament* 4th ed. (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993).

The sources of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Old Testament are the *Septuaginta:With Morphology* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979; published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996) and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia:With Westminster Hebrew Morphology* (German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996, c1925; morphology c1991).

All other sources are acknowledged at the appropriate places within the text.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

ABBREVIATIONS

AV33 – 1933 Afrikaans Translation
AV83 – 1983 Afrikaans New Translation
ASB – American Standard Bible
NASB – New American Standard Bible
NIV – New International Version
KJV – King James Version
NKJV – New King James Version
RSV – Revised Standard Version
TMB – The Message Bible
PNT – The People’s New Testament
ESV – English Standard Version
NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

Vulgate – Bible Vulgate, Latin

BHS – Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia with Westminster Hebrew Morphology

LXX – Septuaginta with Morphology
Stephens – Stephen’s 1550 Textus Receptus
SCR – Scrivener’s 1881 Textus Receptus
NA27 – Nestlé Aland 27th Edition Greek New Testament
BYZ – Byzantine/Majority Textform Greek New Testament

Chapter One

I. INTRODUCTION

A talk given a long time ago by Richard Wurmbrand and Brother Andrew concerning the *persecuted church* and what we in the West could do to help them comes to mind. People were not much concerned with *helping them* as listening to the “awesome stories” they had to tell. Persecuted Christians were figures from a different galaxy.

Times have changed dramatically. Persecuted believers, including *severely persecuted* believers, are not worlds apart anymore and they are not merely a handful of people as it seemed a few decades ago. Far more people suffer from severe persecution today than any preceding age.

DEFINITION OF PERSECUTION

The word *persecution* is a victim’s word. Persecution is always suffered but never inflicted. So monarchs never believed they were “persecuting” others, merely punishing people for breaking divine or human laws¹.

Prof Dr Thomas Shirmacher of the *World Evangelical Alliance* defines persecution as “the suffering of pressure, mental, moral, or physical; which authorities, individuals, or crowds inflict on others, for (one’s) opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or, as a last resort,

¹ Loades, [electronic ed.]

execution”². In many regions execution doesn’t come as “a last resort” but often as the only resort.

The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines persecution as “harassment and suffering which people and institutions inflict upon others for being different in their faith, world-view, culture, or race. Persecution seeks to intimidate, silence, punish, or even to kill people”³.

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* describes it as being “subject to prolonged hostility and ill-treatment” or to “persistently harass or annoy”⁴.

Close to this description is the explanation for the Hebrew word מַדְבִּיר (mūr-dāp) as “aggressive systematic oppression of another”⁵. The root of this word is (דָּבַר) radaph meaning to pursue, chase, persecute⁶.

The Greek word διώκω; ἐκδιώκω; διωγμός means to “systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people”⁷. Religious persecution is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group of individuals as a response to their religious beliefs or affiliations or lack thereof⁸.

James Reapsome of the *Evangelical Mission Information Service* quotes David Barrett when he writes: “Martyrdom is a regular, ongoing feature of church life in the 25 percent of global Christianity that we call the ‘underground church’”⁹.

Achtemeier restricts the definition of persecution to mean only the “formal hostile activity against a specific group”. Mob action against an individual (Acts 7:57-

² Shirmacher, p.86

³ Brand, p.1277

⁴ Soanes, electronic ed.]

⁵ Swanson, [electronic ed.]

⁶ Thomas, [electronic ed.]

⁷ Louw, p.498

⁸ *Religious Persecution*, [Online Available]

⁹ Reapsome, [electronic ed.]

58) or clandestine plots (Acts 23:12-15) are, according to his understanding, not persecution¹⁰.

It is necessary to distinguish between *persecution* and *severe persecution*. The former refers to incidences of harassment or pressure without threat to the lives or property of those being persecuted, whether formally organized or otherwise. The latter refers to the aggressive systematic prolonged mistreatment by authorities, individuals, or crowds seeking to intimidate, silence, punish, and often even to kill people, whether formally organized or otherwise. Severe persecution is a continuous threat, not an isolated occurrence and needs special mention when ministering to the needs of the disciples of Christ.

SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

The Bible identifies a number of potential sources of persistent persecution¹¹.

1. The world

John 15:18; 1John 3:13; Mark 12:7; John 5:18; 15:19; 17:14; Acts 14:22; 1Thessalonians 2:14-15; 1John 3:1

2. Earthly governments

Mark 13:9; 1Kings 19:2; Ne 6:1,9; Esther 3:6; Ps 119:161; Jeremiah 38:6; Daniel 3:13-17; Matthew 10:17; Acts 12:1-3

3. Religious authorities

1Thessalonians 2:13-16; Jeremiah 26:8; Amos 7:12-13; Matthew 23:34-37; Acts 4:27-29; 5:17-18; 22:4

4. Family and friends

Matthew 10:36; Micah 7:6; Genesis 4:8; Matthew 10:21; Mark 3:21; Galatians 4:29

¹⁰ Achtemeier, pp.772-73

¹¹ Manser, [electronic ed.]

Van Kampen points out that persecution of the Body of Christ is the “wrath of Satan” as described in Revelation 12:12¹².

STATISTICS OF SEVERELY PERSECUTED PEOPLE

This figure is often estimated at 200 million¹³, but due to the fact that acts of violence, such as war, torture, and ethnic cleansing might not necessarily be aimed at religion, and the difference between religious and ethnic identity might sometimes be obscure¹⁴, it is argued that the figure could safely be estimated at 100 million people who are presently being severely persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ¹⁵.

A recent study, cited by the Vatican, reported that 75 out of every 100 people killed as a result of religious hatred are Christian¹⁶.

Reapsome writes: “In one part of the globe, over 10,000 Christians have been killed every year since 1950, due to clashes with anti-Christian mobs, infuriated relatives, state-organized death squads, and so on”.¹⁷ It is unclear to which part of the globe he is referring, but today that part would cover almost one quarter of the inhabited globe.

MAJOR AREAS OF SEVERE PERSECUTION

A major area of intense persecution is in the “10/40 Window” where 97% of the world's least evangelized people live. This rectangular area extends from West Africa across Asia, between the 10th and 40th parallels north of the equator. The 10/40 Window is often called “The Resistant Belt” and includes the majority of the

¹² Van Kampen, p.504.

¹³ Shirrmacher, op. cit.

¹⁴ *Religious Persecution*, op. cit.

¹⁵ *Persecution in the World*, Open Doors USA. [Online Available]

¹⁶ *Intervention by the Holy See at the 16th Ordinary Session of the Human rights Council on religious Freedom*, [Online Available]

¹⁷ Reapsome, op. cit.

world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. The original 10/40 Window included only countries with at least 50% of their land mass within 10 and 40 degrees north latitude. The revised 10/40 Window includes several additional countries, such as Indonesia, that are close to 10 or 40 degrees north latitude and have high concentrations of unreached peoples. An estimated 4.45 billion individuals residing in approximately 8,808 distinct people groups are in the revised 10/40 Window¹⁸.

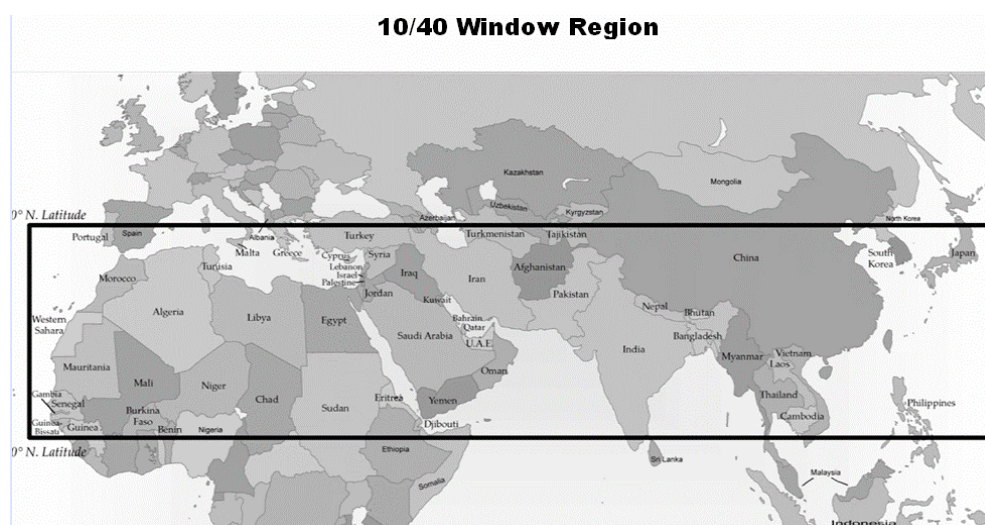


Fig.1.1¹⁹

Countries included in the revised 10/40 Window are: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, China, China (Hong Kong), China Macau, Djibouti, East Timor, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey,

¹⁸ *What is the 10/40 Window?*, [Online Available]

¹⁹ Picture from <http://www.cbfindlay.org/blog/2008/11>

Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, West Bank/Gaza, Western Sahara, Yemen²⁰.

43 of the world's worst countries of persecution fall within the boundaries of the 10/40 Window including the 10 countries most closed to the gospel of Christ. These countries are (in order of precedence) North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Yemen, Iraq, Uzbekistan, and Laos²¹.

Other areas of persecution include the Middle East (Qatar), Africa (north-eastern Kenya, Comoros, Zanzibar Islands), Europe (Belarus, Russia, Chechnya), Latin-America (Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Cuba), and the Persian-Gulf²².

THE NEED FOR DIVINE INTERVENTION

Listening to representatives of *Open Doors International* talking about the needs of persecuted Christians, one request keeps reoccurring. The first request of persecuted Christians is almost always the same: "Pray for us"²³.

For some reason persecuted believers find it more necessary to ask for prayer than, for example, asking for Bibles. Even organizations working to support persecuted Christians in closed countries (such as *Open Doors International*) deem it crucial to exhort believers in "open" countries to not stop praying for these persecuted believers. Dr Carl Moeller, CEO of *Open Doors USA*, writes on 24 February 2011 concerning the dire situation of Christians in North Korea:

"Do you ever wonder if your prayers really make a difference? ...But don't be fooled! The devil would love you to believe your prayers are futile. He would consider it a great victory if your commitment to praying for the suffering church

²⁰ *What is the 10/40 Window?* op. cit.

²¹ *Country Profiles*, [Online Available]

²² *Persecution in the World*, Open Doors SA, [Online Available]

²³ *Persecution and Prayer Alert*, [Online Available]

began to dwindle... First, take note that there is a throne room in heaven—and the throne is NOT empty! ...Secondly, don't miss the amazing truth that the prayers of God's people—that includes you and me—are as incense filling golden bowls in the throne room of heaven! ...I may not understand how or why the Lord should choose to work out His Kingdom purposes through my feeble prayers—but I do know that in His mercy He does just that!”²⁴

Is it because there is a place where nothing will help the believers being persecuted other than divine intervention? Do Christians become intimidated and discouraged in the light of persecution? Do Christians even consider forfeiting their faith in Christ just to alleviate the pressure upon them? It seems so. Gooch writes about the persecutions under Decius in 249 AD:

“While the government targeted Christian leaders, mobs in Alexandria and other cities attacked the rank and file. Eusebius preserves a letter from Dionysius of Alexandria describing the attacks of a mob: ‘Next they took a female convert named Quinta to the idol’s temple and tried to make her worship. When she turned her back in disgust, they tied her feet and dragged her right through the city over the rough paved road, bumping her on the great stones and beating her as they went, till they arrived at the same place, where they stoned her to death. Then they ran in a body to the houses of the Christians, charged in by groups on those they knew as neighbors, raided, plundered, and looted.’ The church practically collapsed. Thousands of Christians either offered sacrifices or obtained a certificate (*libellus*) saying that they had sacrificed”²⁵.

A SPECIAL APPROACH

²⁴ *From Carl's perspective*, [Online Available]

²⁵ Gooch, “Cowards Among the Christians”, [electronic ed.]

Ministering to severely persecuted believers requires a special approach. Exhorting persecuted believers has an important place in ministering to those believers, but it is not good enough. Throughout the New Testament believers have been exhorted and admonished to stand firm during trials and persecutions. Yet Jesus saw fit to appear to John on Patmos to give him an “inside look” so as to comfort and strengthen the victims of severe persecution of the time. It seems that evil can become so intense and the onslaught so fierce that mere exhortations and admonitions do not manage to secure the hearts of the believers. It seems that Jesus adopted a special approach to minister to these disciples.

There are some churches and organizations that provide trauma counseling for persecuted Christians, and there is an ever-increasing need for more of this. *Open Doors South Africa* writes: “The need for trauma counseling is high among young people...”²⁶. *Open Doors United Kingdom* reports: “A special Christmas gift of £33 can help our team provide a trauma counseling session with relief supplies of food and blankets”²⁷. Al Janssen of *Open Doors USA* says: “One of the things we're trying to do is provide trauma counseling for these people – to bring in professionals who can help them deal with the emotional traumas that they've experienced”²⁸. Trauma counseling is a very important and much needed ministry when dealing with persecuted believers, but it seems insufficient on its own. Although it is indispensable, it doesn't provide answers to the deep seated questions that rise in the hearts of those afflicted.

Circumstances surrounding the severely persecuted make it difficult to answer questions such as: How do you minister to a person when there is no escape from the trauma he/she is facing – when the possibility of him/her being killed is alarmingly

²⁶ *Iraq: Country profile*, [Online Available]

²⁷ *Christians in Iraq forced to flee their homes*, [Online Available]

²⁸ *Iraqi refugees struggling after leaving homeland*, [Online Available]

high? What encouragement is there for believers who see their houses and businesses being destroyed, their loved ones brutally and publicly killed, maimed, raped or being taken away never to be seen again? Where was God when it happened? Why doesn't God stop this? Hasn't God defeated the devil – why is he still rampant? I prayed and cried to God for mercy, but He didn't act... Why? When is this going to stop? Why do the people who do this go unpunished? Why doesn't God rescue me?

These are questions we dare not avoid if we want to minister deeply and effectively to severely persecuted believers.

LITTLE OR NO TRAINING IN THE UNPERSECUTED WORLD

The majority of believers are devoid of quick answers and simple solutions in the face of severe persecution. There is a place many believers reach where reason and rationalization have no ground. This place is often commonly described as “just endure”, but just enduring has its limits for most. Something more is needed to lift the spirit of a persecuted believer to remain steadfast regardless of the outcome, whether it be a beating, beheading, burning, rape, severe humiliation and loss of loved ones or torture.

Paging through Christian Counseling manuals one will find typical counseling problem areas. They range from personal issues such as anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, loneliness, child rearing, adolescence, middle age and “later years”, to child abuse, homosexuality, violence and abuse, addictions, finances and marital issues (and more), but nowhere is there anything on persecution.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services during the Federal fiscal year 2007, “an estimated 3.2 million referrals, involving the alleged

maltreatment of approximately 5.8 million children, were referred to CPS agencies”²⁹ in the US. The US government has invested millions of dollars to develop strategies, counseling approaches, and even legislation to deal with people who have undergone abuse as children and to help prevent the evil from spreading.

Almost 20 times more people undergo strict to severe persecution for their faith in Christ than children being abused or neglected in America, yet little or no training is available in helping these believers cope with their reality. Not only is it estimated that at least 100 million Christians live under the sword of persecution, and not only have millions of people already suffered and died for their faith in Jesus through the ages, but the Bible says every believer in Christ Jesus will experience persecution in his/her lifetime, ranging from being snubbed at a party to being killed or tortured (2Timothy 3:12).

The ever-present possibility of persecution for many Christians calls for response. Daniel Kyanda, who escaped execution under Idi Amin, now represents *Christian Solidarity International* in Nairobi, Kenya. He travels around Africa giving seminars on preparation for persecution. Why? “When I see more and more Africans being converted, I just conclude that each one is a candidate for persecution,” he says³⁰.

WHY THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

As will be more thoroughly discussed in chapter five of this paper, Revelation was purposefully written to uplift, encourage and comfort those under persecution in 95 AD. Believers suffered great hardships, pain, and trauma. Jesus revealed Himself to

²⁹ *How many children are abused and neglected each year?* [Online Available]

³⁰ Reapsome, op.cit

John on Patmos with a very specific message directed to these believers and ultimately to all believers throughout the ages who will suffer for His Name's sake.

What Jesus intended by this message is the foundation on which we base healing counseling to the severely persecuted Church.

Chapter Two

II. A HERITAGE OF MARTYRDOM – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION PAST AND PRESENT

The way of this world is to praise dead saints and persecute living ones³¹.

Persecution is not a “new thing”; it’s also not a unique Christian experience. It is a worldwide phenomenon reaching as far back as the brothers Cain and Abel. However, followers of God have endured far more persecution than any other group of people in human history. But, as Augustin wrote to Boniface in 417AD: “...the true Church must necessarily be the one which suffers persecution, not the one inflicting it”³².

The first great persecution for religious opinion of which we have any record is that which broke out against the worshippers of God among the Jews in the days of Ahab, when that king sought in the most relentless manner to extirpate the worship of Jehovah and substitute in its place the worship of Ashtoreth and Baal. In all ages, in one form or another, the people of God have had to suffer persecution³³.

The *Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia* states:

“Persecution of Christians as a consequence of professing their faith can be traced both historically and in the current era. Early Christians were persecuted for their faith, at the hands of both Jews from whose religion Christianity arose... the Roman Empire which controlled much of the land early Christianity was distributed across... [and] individual Christian denominations suffering persecution at the hands of other Christians under the charge of heresy... In the 20th century, Christians have been

³¹ Green, [electronic ed.]

³² Schaff, *Vol. IV* p.633

³³ Easton, [electronic ed.]

persecuted by radical Muslim and Hindu groups... and by atheistic states such as the USSR and North Korea”³⁴.

It is necessary here to focus on a brief overview of the history of severe persecution experienced by followers of Jesus Christ. Many instances of persecution were more fuelled by political factors than faith factors where Christians were seen as a political destabilizing factor that should be kept in check. However, other instances of severe persecution were fuelled by a systematic strategy to eradicate faith in Jesus. Regardless of the motivation, many millions of Christians were killed, maimed, tortured, or displaced.

Persecution is an intrinsic heritage of disciples of Jesus Christ, and although we might experience freedom of religion and democracy under our present systems of government, we may never rule out the fact that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Timothy 3:12). We might (and must) pray for peace and stability (1Timothy 2:2), but should not be “surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1Peter 4:12 NIV)

A HERITAGE OF MARTYRDOM

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Nothing describes the reality of persecution of the Christian faith more than the Greek word for being a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. μαρτυρέω simply

³⁴ *Persecution of Christians*, [Online Available]

means to bear witness, testify, testimony, or having a good reputation³⁵, but the word became popular for an entirely different reason. To be a witness means to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus, but in testifying to the truthfulness of the gospel, disciples often encounter fierce resistance from demonic forces trying to halt that testimony. The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16), but the gospel-carriers often paid with their lives.

The special use of *martyría* 'Iēsoú as a formula for the gospel is perhaps linked with the fact that Jesus is the faithful witness even to the point of death (1Timothy 6:13)³⁶. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11). As the early witnesses sealed their testimony to the faith with their own blood, the first meaning was readily merged into the second³⁷. Witnessing and suffering as a result became synonymous.

PERSECUTION IN ANTIQUITY

1. Persecution of Christians in the New Testament

Persecution of Christians is a frequent theme in the New Testament. It is predicted in the Gospels (Matthew 5:10–12; 24:9–14; Luke 21:12–19; John 16:2), and is a recurrent theme in Acts (Acts 4:17–18; 5:17–42; 7:54–8:3; 12:1–5) and the letters of Paul (e.g., 2Corinthians 11:23–26; 1Thessalonians 2:14–16; cf. 2Timothy 3:11–12). It appears to be part of the intention of the writing of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1–11) and 1Peter (1Peter 1:6–7; 4:12–16; 5:9–10)³⁸.

³⁵ Thomas, op.cit.

³⁶ Kittel, p.568.

³⁷ Lee Tan, [electronic ed.]

³⁸ Myers, p.814

Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:58; 22:20); James was killed with a sword (Acts 12:2); Peter died a violent death (John 21:18-19); Antipas was killed (Revelation 2:13). According to Wood, the Christians' willingness to face suffering was exemplified by the example of Jesus and by the "association of persecution with the longed-for end of the age (Mark 13:7-13)"³⁹.

The preaching of a crucified Messiah whose death was publicly blamed on the Jewish leaders was highly provocative. Wood points out that the people were favorably inclined towards the disciples (Acts 2:46f.; 5:14), the Pharisees moderately inclined (Acts 5:34ff.; 23:6ff.), while opposition arose among the Sadducees (Acts 4:1, 6; 5:17). Stephen's preaching of the "transitoriness of the law (Acts 6:14) turned public opinion and brought about the first persecution in Jerusalem and elsewhere, e.g. Damascus"⁴⁰. Throughout Acts the Jews appear as Paul's most vehement enemies. This attitude could only have been made worse by the Apostolic Council which "repudiated the need for circumcision, and it culminated in the excommunication of Christians at Jamnia, c. AD 80"⁴¹. Johannine Christians tell of a formal synagogue policy to expel those who confessed Jesus as the Christ (John 9:22; 12:42-43; 16:1-2). Some scholars identify this with the *Birkath ha-minim*, the ban of excommunication on heretics. Jewish hostility towards Christians became formal policy after the Roman-Jewish war (66-70)⁴².

2. Persecution of early Christians in the Roman Empire

Rome's attitude underwent a marked change. At first, as we see in Acts, she gave Christians tolerance and even encouragement. This soon gave way to fierce

³⁹ Wood, pp.902-03.

⁴⁰ Wood, Ibid.

⁴¹ Wood, Ibid.

⁴² Achtemeier, op.cit.

opposition. Such was the Christians' unpopularity by AD 64 that Nero could make them scapegoats for the fire. In Bithynia by AD 112, persistence in Christianity was a capital offence⁴³. In contrast to Judaism, Christianity did not have the advantage of the Jews, whose strange religion could at least be identified as the ancient faith of a particular land and people and thus had long been given official protection⁴⁴.

Galli notes that of the 54 emperors that ruled the Roman Empire from AD 30 until AD 311, only about a dozen took the trouble to harass Christians⁴⁵. Here are the most significant of those rulers:

(a) Claudius (41–54)

Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome around AD 52. Christians were perceived as a Jewish sect and therefore Claudius most likely and inadvertently was the first emperor to persecute Christians for, it seems, disturbing the peace⁴⁶.

(b) Nero (64–68)

Little is known of Nero's alleged persecution of Christians after the fire in Rome in AD 64⁴⁷. From Nero's killing of Christians in Rome in AD 64 until 250, persecution of Christians was mostly local⁴⁸. However, Wood claims that Nero, to divert the suspicion that he had started it for his own entertainment, accused another party about whom "the public were also prepared to believe the worst. Having forced

⁴³ Wood, op.cit.

⁴⁴ Myers, pp. 893-94.

⁴⁵ Galli, [electronic ed.]

⁴⁶ Galli, Ibid.

⁴⁷ Wood, op.cit.

⁴⁸ Myers, op.cit.

a conviction for arson against certain Christians he conducted mass arrests, and among other tortures burnt his victims alive in public”⁴⁹.

(c) Domitian (81–96)

The historian Pliny called Domitian the beast from hell who sat in its den, licking blood. Domitian was the first emperor to have himself officially titled in Rome as “God the Lord.” He insisted that other people hail his greatness with acclamations like “Lord of the earth,” “Invincible,” “Glory,” “Holy,” and “Thou Alone”⁵⁰. When he ordered people to give him divine honors, Jews, and no doubt Christians, balked. The resulting persecution of Jews is well-documented; that of Christians is not.

(d) Trajan (98–117)

A series of letters to Bithynian governor Pliny display Trajan’s concern for the welfare of the provinces. Unfortunately for Christians, this concern was combined with suspicious preoccupation with state security and a tendency to interfere in internal affairs of ostensibly self-governing cities. Christians were perceived as a disruptive influence in Asia Minor⁵¹. In one letter he tells Pliny how to deal with Christians “They are not to be hunted out. [Although] any who are accused and convicted should be punished, with the proviso that if a man says he is not a Christian and makes it obvious by his actual conduct—namely, by worshiping our gods—then, however suspect he may have been with regard to the past, he should gain pardon from his repentance”⁵². It is only in the second century (ca. 110), at the time of Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 10.96-97), that we learn of a formal Roman policy to root out

⁴⁹ Wood, p.816

⁵⁰ Galli, op.cit.

⁵¹ Myers, p.1015

⁵² Wood, op.cit.

Christian beliefs. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was perhaps the best known to have suffered death during his reign⁵³.

(e) Marcus Aurelius (161–180)

Having converted to Stoicism early in life he displayed “lofty and bracing austerity”. He wrote: “Men exist for each other. Either improve them, or put up with them”⁵⁴. Officially however, Marcus took the position of his predecessor Trajan against the Christians⁵⁵, as did Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. His philosophical mentors convinced him that Christianity was a dangerous revolutionary force, preaching gross immoralities. So under Marcus, anti-Christian literature flourished for the first time, most notably Celsus’s *The True Doctrine*⁵⁶. More regrettably, Marcus allowed anti-Christian informers to act more freely than in the past, with the result that fierce persecutions broke out in various regions. In Lyons in 177, the local bishop was martyred, bringing Irenaeus to the office. In addition, Justin, the first Christian philosopher, was martyred during Marcus’s reign (AD 165)⁵⁷. During the reign of the philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius Christian blood flowed more profusely than ever before⁵⁸.

(f) Septimius Severus (193–211)

Severus was a soldier, first and last. At the point of death, he is said to have summoned his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, and said, “Keep on good terms with

⁵³ Galli, op.cit.

⁵⁴ Galli, Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cross, p.1041

⁵⁶ Cross, p.314

⁵⁷ Showers, [electronic ed.]

⁵⁸ Galli, op.cit.

each other, be generous to the soldiers, and take no heed of anyone else”⁵⁹. During the first part of his reign, Severus was not unfriendly toward Christians. Some members of his household, in fact, professed the faith, and he entrusted the rearing of his son, Caracalla, to a Christian nurse. However, in 202 Severus issued an edict that forbade further conversions to Judaism and Christianity⁶⁰. A persecution followed, especially in North Africa and Egypt. The North African theologian Tertullian penned his famous apologetic works during this period, but to no avail. Among others, the dramatic martyrdom of Perpetua and her servant Felicitas occurred under Severus⁶¹. Clement of Alexandria also perished, as did the father of Origen. But the persecution ended at Severus’s death, and except for a brief bout under Maximinus (235–238), Christians were free from persecution for some 50 years.

(g) Decius (249–251)

For decades, Roman emperors had become increasingly concerned with the ragged edges of the Empire. Decius recognized the military dimensions of the problem but perceived some spiritual ones as well. He was concerned that traditional polytheism was weakening, and thought a resurrection of devotion to the deified Roman rulers of the past would help restore Roman strength. Naturally, monotheistic Christians stood in the way. Their efficient and self-contained organization, with no need of the state, irritated him. Consequently, Decius became the first emperor to initiate an Empire-wide persecution of Christians, apparently one with intensity. Although he did not actually order Christians to give up their faith, he did expect them to perform one pagan religious observance⁶². When undertaken, Christians would

⁵⁹ Galli, *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Schaff, *Vol. IV op.cit.*

⁶¹ Hammack, [electronic ed.]

⁶² Galli, *op.cit.*

receive a Certificate of Sacrifice (*libellus*) from the local Sacrificial Commission and so be cleared of suspicion of undermining the religious unity of the Empire⁶³. As expected, many Christians succumbed to this pressure; others paid bribes to receive the certificate. But many refused to compromise and died as a result. Origen was arrested and tortured during this time⁶⁴.

(h) Valerian (253–260)

Valerian seems to have been honest and well intentioned, but he inherited an empire nearly out of control. To divert attention from the troubles that beset the Empire, Valerian blamed the Christians. In August 257 he intensified Decius's policies by ordering clergy to sacrifice to the gods of the state (although, with usual Roman pragmatism, they were not prohibited from worshiping Jesus Christ in private.) A year later, clergy became liable to capital punishment. Pope Sixtus II and St. Lawrence were subsequently burned to death in Rome, and Cyprian was executed at Carthage⁶⁵. In addition, the property of Christian laity, especially that of senators and *equites* (a class immediately below senators) was confiscated, and Christian tenants of imperial estates were condemned to the mines⁶⁶.

(i) Diocletian (284–305)

Diocletian was the most remarkable imperial organizer since Augustus⁶⁷, and that talent, unfortunately, was not lost on Christians. Diocletian's gift for mass organization, unfortunately, extended to things religious and patriotic. In February 23,

⁶³ Hicks, p.199

⁶⁴ Schaff, *Second Series Vol. I* p.281.

⁶⁵ Schaff, *Second Series Vol. III* p.376

⁶⁶ Galli, op.cit.

⁶⁷ Mindeman, p.206

303⁶⁸, encouraged by his Caesar Galerius, and attempting to rouse patriotic feeling, Diocletian returned to hounding Christians, even though his wife, Prisca, belonged to the faith. The motive of this Great Persecution was the total extinction of Christianity⁶⁹. The first of Diocletian's edicts prohibited all Christian worship and commanded that churches and Christian books be destroyed. Two further edicts, required in the eastern provinces, ordered clergy to be arrested unless they sacrificed to pagan deities. By 304 this edict was extended to all Christians and was particularly vicious in Africa⁷⁰.

3. Persecutions of early Christians outside the Roman Empire

In 341, the Zoroastrian Shapur II ordered the massacre of all Christians in Persia. Christians were persecuted because the rival Roman Empire had espoused Christianity, and Christians in Persia were suspect⁷¹. During the persecution, about 1 150 Christians were martyred⁷². In the 4th century, the Terving King Athanaric began persecuting Christians, many of whom were killed⁷³.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

1. Persecution of Christians in the early and medieval Caliphates

The Arab conquests of the 7th–8th centuries subjected large communities of Christians (and Jews) to Muslim rule. Unlike pagans, they were recognized as ‘people of the book’ and incorporated into the Muslim State as ‘dhimmis’, who in return for payment of the ‘jizya’, part tribute and part penal tax, were awarded protected status

⁶⁸ Herklots, [electronic ed.]

⁶⁹ Schaff, *Second Series Vol. I*, p.400

⁷⁰ Galli, [electronic ed.]

⁷¹ Pfeiffer, [electronic ed.]

⁷² *Persecution of Christians (2)* [Online Available]

⁷³ Gibbon, op.cit.

and permitted to retain their own religion and laws. The *dhimmis* have usually suffered a varying degree of fiscal, legal, and social oppression, and more rarely violent persecution⁷⁴. Christians under Islamic rule had the right to convert to Islam or any other religion, while a *murtad*, or apostate of Islam, faced severe penalties or even *hadd*, which could include the death penalty⁷⁵.

2. Medieval Christian Persecution of Heresy

In the medieval period the Roman Catholic Church moved to suppress the Cathar heresy. In 1208 Pope Innocent III sanctioned a seven year crusade against the Albigensians⁷⁶, during the course of which the massacre of Béziers took place, with between seven and twenty thousand deaths. The Crusade was carried out primarily by the French. Over the twenty-year period of this campaign an estimated 200 000 to 1 000 000 people were killed⁷⁷.

John Huss, a Bohemian preacher of reformation, was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415⁷⁸. Pope Martin V issued a bull on 17 March 1420 which proclaimed a crusade “for the destruction of the Wycliffites, Hussites and all other heretics in Bohemia”⁷⁹.

The Crusades in the Middle East also spilled over into conquest of Eastern Orthodox Christians by Roman Catholics and attempted suppression of the Orthodox Church. The Waldenses were also persecuted by the Catholic Church, but survive up to this day⁸⁰.

⁷⁴ Cross, p.858

⁷⁵ *Persecution of Christians during the Middle Ages* [Online Available]

⁷⁶ Mindeman, p. 209.

⁷⁷ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period* [Online Available]

⁷⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [electronic ed.]

⁷⁹ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, op.cit.

⁸⁰ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, Ibid.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1500 TO 1815)

The Reformation led to a long period of warfare and communal violence between Catholic and Protestant factions, leading to massacres and forced suppression of the alternative views by the dominant faction in much of Europe⁸¹.

1. Anti-Catholic

Anti-Catholicism officially began in 1534 during the English Reformation⁸². During this time Thomas More was executed⁸³. Queen Elizabeth I's scorn for Jesuit missionaries led to many executions at Tyburn. Almost all lands owned by Irish Catholics were confiscated and given to Protestant settlers. Under the penal laws no Irish Catholic could sit in the Parliament of Ireland, even though some 90% of Ireland's population was native Irish Catholic when the first of these bans was introduced in 1691⁸⁴.

2. Anti-Eastern Orthodox

In 1656, Macarios III Zaim, who was the Greek Patriarch of Antioch, lamented over the atrocities committed by the Polish Catholics against followers of Greek Orthodoxy. Macarios was quoted as stating that seventy or eighty thousand followers of Eastern Orthodoxy were killed at the hands of the Catholics. Greek Patriarch Macarios desired Turkish sovereignty over Catholic subjugation⁸⁵.

3. Anti-Protestant

⁸¹ *Persecution of Christians during the Middle Ages*, op.cit.

⁸² Martin, "Catholic Counterpoint" [electronic ed.]

⁸³ Reid, p. 260

⁸⁴ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, op.cit.

⁸⁵ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, Ibid.

Anti-Protestantism originated as a reaction by the Catholic Church to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Protestants were denounced as heretics and subject to persecution in such territories, such as Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, in which the Catholics were the dominant power⁸⁶. This movement was orchestrated by Popes and Princes as the Counter Reformation. This resulted in religious wars and eruptions of sectarian hatred such as the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572⁸⁷.

4. Persecution of the Anabaptists

When the disputes between Lutherans and Roman Catholics gained a political dimension, both groups saw other groups of religious dissidents that were arising as a danger to their own security⁸⁸. The early “Täufer” (lit. “Baptists”) were mistrusted and rejected by both religio-political parties. Religious persecution is often perpetrated as a means of political control, and this becomes evident with the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555⁸⁹. This treaty provided the legal groundwork for persecution of the Anabaptists⁹⁰.

5. China

Beginning in the late 17th century, Christianity was banned for at least a century in China by Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty after the Pope forbade Chinese Catholics from venerating their relatives or Confucius⁹¹. During the Boxer

⁸⁶ Cross, p. 427

⁸⁷ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, op.cit.

⁸⁸ Eckman, p.54

⁸⁹ Hope, p.154

⁹⁰ *Persecution of Christians: Early Modern Period*, op.cit.

⁹¹ *Kangxi of China* [Online Available]

Rebellion, anti-Christian Boxers, and Muslim Kansu Braves serving in the Chinese army attacked Christians⁹².

During the Northern Expedition, the Kuomintang incited anti-foreign, anti-Western sentiment. Portraits of Sun Yatsen replaced the crucifix in several churches, KMT posters proclaimed- “Jesus Christ is dead. Why not worship something alive such as Nationalism?”. Foreign missionaries were attacked and anti-foreign riots broke out. Westerners fled from the province, and some Chinese Christians were also attacked as imperialist agents⁹³.

During China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), religious activity was forced underground, most Bibles were destroyed, believers’ homes were looted, and many Christians were imprisoned or executed. In 1983 the government arrested hundreds of church leaders and cracked down on illegal house-church meetings⁹⁴.

6. Japan

In 1597, 26 Japanese converts suffered martyrdom by crucifixion at Nagasaki under Toyotomi Hideyoshi⁹⁵. Tokugawa Ieyasu assumed control over Japan in 1600. Like Toyotomi Hideyoshi, he disliked Christian activities in Japan. The Tokugawa shogunate finally decided to ban Catholicism in 1614, and in the mid-17th century it demanded the expulsion of all European missionaries and the execution of all converts. This marked the end of open Christianity in Japan. The Shimabara Rebellion, led by a young Japanese Christian boy named Amakusa Shiro Tokisada, took place in 1637. After the Hara Castle fell, the shogunate's forces beheaded an estimated 37 000 rebels and sympathizers. Amakusa Shirō's severed head was taken

⁹² *The Boxer rebellion*, [Online Available]

⁹³ *Persecution of Christians: China* [Online Available]

⁹⁴ Reapsome, op.cit

⁹⁵ Cross, p.868

to Nagasaki for public display, and the entire complex at Hara Castle was burned to the ground and buried together with the bodies of all the dead⁹⁶. According to Dr. E. R. Bull, a Methodist missionary to the Ryuku Islands of Japan, a huge grave has been discovered on the Island of Amakusa, where a marker states that the heads of 11 111 Christians are buried there. The Japanese authorities buried their bodies and heads separately to prevent the bodily resurrection the Christians believed in⁹⁷.

Many of the Christians in Japan continued for two centuries to maintain their religion as Kakure Kirishitan, or hidden Christians, without any priests or pastors. Some of those who were killed for their faith are venerated as the Martyrs of Japan by the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church⁹⁸.

Although Christianity was later allowed during the Meiji era, Christians were again persecuted during the period of State Shinto⁹⁹.

7. India

In spite of the fact that there have been relatively fewer conflicts between Muslims and Christians in India in comparison to those between Muslims and Hindus, or Muslims and Sikhs, the relationship between Muslims and Christians has occasionally been turbulent. With the advent of European colonialism in India throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, Christians were systematically persecuted in a few Muslim ruled kingdoms in India¹⁰⁰.

Perhaps the most infamous acts of anti-Christian persecution by Muslims was committed by Tippu Sultan. He issued orders to seize the Christians in Canara,

⁹⁶ *Persecution of Christians: Japan* [Online Available]

⁹⁷ Lee Tan, "The 11 111 Heads", [electronic ed.]

⁹⁸ *Kakure Kirishitan: Christianity in Japan*, [Online Available]

⁹⁹ *Persecution of Christians: Japan*, op.cit.

¹⁰⁰ *Persecution of Christians: India* [Online Available]

confiscate their estates, and deport them to Seringapatam. Between 60 000 and 70 000 of the entire Mangalorean Catholic community were captured and forced to climb nearly 4,000 feet (1 200 m) through the jungles of the Western Ghat mountain ranges for 210 miles (340 km). The journey took six weeks. According to British Government records, 20 000 people died during the march and 30 000 were forcibly converted to Islam¹⁰¹. The young women and girls were forcibly made wives of the Muslims living there. The young men who offered resistance were disfigured by cutting their noses, upper lips, and ears¹⁰².

8. The French Revolution

The dechristianisation of France during the French Revolution resulted in a campaign conducted by various Robespierre-era governments of France, beginning with the start of the French Revolution in 1789. It aimed to eliminate any symbol that might be associated with the past, especially the monarchy¹⁰³.

(a) Anti-Christian policies¹⁰⁴ of the Campaign:

- (i) The deportation of clergy and the condemnation of many of them to death
- (ii) The closing, desecration and pillaging of churches, removal of the word “saint” from street names and other acts to banish Christian culture from the public sphere
- (iii) Removal of statues, plates and other iconography from places of worship

¹⁰¹ *Captivity of Mangalorean Catholics at Seringapatam*, [Online Available]

¹⁰² *Persecution of Christians: India*, op.cit.

¹⁰³ *Persecution of Christians: French Revolution*, [Online Available]

¹⁰⁴ *Reign of Terror*, [Online Available]

- (iv) Destruction of crosses, bells and other external signs of worship
- (v) The institution of revolutionary and civic cults, including the Cult of Reason and subsequently the Cult of the Supreme Being
- (vi) The large scale destruction of religious monuments
- (vii) The outlawing of public and private worship and religious education
- (viii) Forced marriages of the clergy
- (ix) Forced abjurement of the priesthood
- (x) The enactment of a law on October 21, 1793 making all nonjuring priests and all persons who harbored them liable to death on sight.

The climax was reached with the celebration of the Goddess “Reason” in Notre Dame Cathedral on 10 November¹⁰⁵. Under threat of death, imprisonment, military conscription or loss of income, about 20 000 constitutional priests were forced to abdicate or hand over their letters of ordination and 6 000 to 9 000 were coerced into marriage, many ceasing their ministerial duties. Some of those who abdicated covertly ministered to the people. By the end of the decade, approximately 30 000 priests were forced to leave France, and thousands who did not leave were executed¹⁰⁶.

In 1793 the massacre of 6 000 Vendéans, many of them women, took place after the battle of Savenay, along with the drowning of 3 000 Vendée women at Pont-au-Baux and 5 000 Vendée priests, old men, women, and children killed by drowning at the Loire River at Nantes in what was called the "national bath" - tied in groups in

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, p.8

¹⁰⁶ Tallet, p.10

barges and then sunk into the Loire. By July 1796, the estimated Vendean dead numbered between 117 000 and 500 000, out of a population of around 800 000¹⁰⁷.

THE MODERN ERA (1815 TO 1989)

1. The Ottoman Empire

The Young Turkish government of the collapsing Ottoman Empire in 1915 persecuted Christian populations in Anatolia resulting in an estimated 2.1 million deaths, divided between roughly 1.2 Million Armenian Christians, 600 000 Syriac/Assyrian Christians and 300 000 Greek Orthodox Christians. A number of Georgians were also killed¹⁰⁸.

2. The Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact Countries

According to Patrick Johnstone, compiler of *Operation World*¹⁰⁹, the church in the USSR has suffered “more severe and sustained more persecution than that of any nation in recent history.” The Soviet Union was the first state to have as an ideological objective the elimination of religion. It is estimated that 21 million Russian Orthodox Christians were martyred in the gulags by the Soviet government. Torture and the killing of other Christian denominations were rife. Barrett estimates that of the 60 million killed and 66 million imprisoned between 1917 and 1953, half were Christians¹¹⁰.

Tens of thousands of churches were destroyed or converted to other uses, and many members of the clergy were imprisoned for anti-government activities. In the

¹⁰⁷ *The French Revolution for visitors to France*, [Online Available]

¹⁰⁸ *The 1915 Armenian Holocaust*, [Online Available]

¹⁰⁹ Reapsome, op.cit

¹¹⁰ Reapsome, Ibid.

period between 1927 and 1940, the number of Orthodox Churches in the Russian Republic fell from 29 584 to less than 500¹¹¹.

After Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, Joseph Stalin revived the Russian Orthodox Church to intensify patriotic support for the war effort. By 1957 about 22 000 Russian Orthodox churches had become active¹¹². But in 1959 Nikita Khrushchev initiated his own campaign against the Russian Orthodox Church and forced the closure of about 12 000 churches. By 1985 fewer than 7 000 churches remained active. This persecution continued until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991¹¹³.

3. 19th and 20th century Mexico

In the 19th century, Benito Juárez confiscated a large amount of church land. The Mexican government's campaign against the Catholic Church after the Mexican Revolution, culminated in the 1917 constitution which contained numerous articles which Catholics considered a violation of their civil rights: outlawing monastic religious orders, forbidding public worship outside of church buildings, restricted religious organizations' rights to own property, and taking away basic civil rights of members of the clergy¹¹⁴.

The effects of the persecution on the Church were profound. Between 1926 and 1934 at least 40 priests were killed. Where there were 4 500 priests serving the people before the rebellion, in 1934 there were only 334 priests licensed by the government to serve fifteen million people, the rest having been eliminated by emigration, expulsion and assassination. By 1935, 17 states had no priest at all¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ *USSR anti-religious campaign*, [Online Available]

¹¹² *Russian Orthodox Church*, [Online Available]

¹¹³ *Lecture for Ch 607 The History of the Slavic-Russian Orthodox Churches*, [Online Available]

¹¹⁴ Cross, p.1088

¹¹⁵ *Anti-Clericalism*, [Online Available]

4. Madagascar

Queen Ranavalona I called “Ranavalona the Cruel” (who reigned from 1828–1861) issued a royal edict prohibiting the practice of Christianity in Madagascar, expelled British missionaries from the island, and persecuted Christian converts who would not renounce their religion¹¹⁶. Most of the people suspected of committing crimes went on trial for the crime of practicing Christianity and had to drink the poison of the Tangena tree. If they survived the ordeal (which few did), the authorities judged them innocent. Malagasy Christians would remember this period as “the time when the land was dark”. By some estimates, 150 000 Christians died during the reign of Ranavalona the Cruel¹¹⁷. The island grew more isolated, and commerce with other nations came to a standstill.

5. Spain during the Spanish Civil War

Persecution of Catholics mostly, before and at the beginning of the Spanish Civil war involved the murder of almost 7 000 priests and other clergy, as well as thousands of lay people, by sections of nearly all the leftist groups because of their faith. The Roman Catholic Church was driven underground¹¹⁸.

During 1936-1939, and especially in the early months of the conflict, individual clergymen and entire religious communities were executed by leftists, which included communists and anarchists. The death toll of the clergy alone included 13 bishops, 4 172 diocesan priests and seminarians, 2 364 monks and friars

¹¹⁶ Toon, p.382

¹¹⁷ Lee Tan, op.cit.

¹¹⁸ Cross, p.1537

and 283 nuns. A total of 6 832 clerical victims. A slogan in the Spanish Civil War declared: “Long live death! Down with intelligence!”¹¹⁹.

6. Nazi Germany

Hitler and the Nazis enjoyed widespread support from traditional Christian communities, mainly due to a common cause against the anti-religious German Bolsheviks. Once in power, the Nazis moved to consolidate their power over the German churches and bring them in line with Nazi ideals. Dissenting Christians went underground and formed the Confessing Church¹²⁰, which was persecuted as a subversive group by the Nazi government. Many of its leaders were arrested and sent to concentration camps, and left the underground mostly leaderless¹²¹.

7. Franco's Spain

In Franco's authoritarian Spanish State, Protestantism was deliberately marginalized and persecuted. During the Civil War, the government persecuted the country's 30 000 Protestants and forced many Protestant pastors to leave the country. Once authoritarian rule was established, non-Catholic Bibles were confiscated by police and Protestant schools were closed. Although the 1945 Spanish Bill of Rights granted freedom of *private* worship, Protestants suffered legal discrimination and non-Catholic religious services were not permitted publicly, to the extent that they could not be in buildings which had exterior signs indicating it was a house of worship and that public activities were prohibited¹²².

¹¹⁹ Winter, p.61

¹²⁰ Pierard, [electronic ed.]

¹²¹ Dockery, p.876

¹²² *Persecution of Christians: Franco's Era* [Online Available]

8. Uganda

In Uganda, under Idi Amin, some 400,000 Christians died, disappeared, or fled the country between 1971 and 1976. The most notable martyr was Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum, apparently shot by Amin himself¹²³.

THE CURRENT SITUATION (1989 TO PRESENT)

The following are the ten countries most restricted to the gospel of Jesus Christ:

1. North Korea

According to the *Open Doors* update¹²⁴ in 2011, the situation in North Korea remains horrific. The whole country is under the spell of the *Juche* ideology and the worship of the “Great Leader.” As a result Christians do not even have the right to exist, according to the government. Despite this persecution, Christianity is growing slowly. There are many risks for Christians, most of them deadly. In 2010 hundreds of Christians were arrested for various reasons. Some were killed and others sentenced to political camps. For example, a Christian house church in Pyongsung province was discovered by authorities in May 2010 and three Christians were immediately sentenced to death because of the meeting. The other 20 Christians were sent to a labour camp¹²⁵.

2. Iran

¹²³ Reapsome, op.cit

¹²⁴ WWL: *North Korea*, [Online Available]

¹²⁵ *North Korea tops NGO's anti-Christian list*, [Online Available]

Christians continued to be arrested in waves, especially during December 2009 and the first three months of 2010¹²⁶. Many church services are being monitored by the secret police. Believers that are active in churches or the cell group movement are being pressured. They are questioned, arrested and put in jail and beaten under pressure of the authorities. Individual believers are being oppressed by society.

There were frequent demonstrations against the Iranian government. It is assumed that the Iranian government is in crisis with so many of its citizens continuing to openly protest against it. In an effort to distract attention away from these problems, the regime is lashing out against Christians. In total, a few hundred Christians were arrested. Many of the arrested Christians have been released on bail¹²⁷.

In addition there is the risk of repercussions by Islamic extremists, especially when Christians are involved in sharing the gospel with Muslims. The violence can come from a source as close as one's own family. A convert from Islam died as a result of injuries sustained when he was seriously beaten by a family member during the third quarter of 2010¹²⁸. In the meantime, the indigenous church continues to grow, numbering at least 450 000 Christians (indigenous and Assyrian/Armenian)¹²⁹. During the first half of 2010, hundreds of Bibles were seized by security forces and burned. It has been quite a long time since such a harsh measure was taken to thwart the distribution of Bibles.

3. Afghanistan

¹²⁶ WWL: *Iran*, [Online Available]

¹²⁷ *Iran Steps Up Persecution of Christians*, [Online Available]

¹²⁸ WWL: *Iran*, op.cit.

¹²⁹ *In Iran, 'crackdown' on Christians worsens*, [Online Available]

The situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. The government intensified persecution of believers with a Muslim background. Afghanistan has a population of more than 28 million people. Among them are very few Christians. Afghan believers are not accepted by the predominantly Muslim society, and legislation is not clear about the religious rights of Christians¹³⁰. During 2010, there were many examples of intimidation and threats against Christians. In May and June 2010, the Afghan television network *Noorin* repeatedly showed footage of Muslim background believers who were being baptized. Christian aid organizations were also accused of evangelism. In response to the broadcast, the secretary of the Lower House during a session of parliament called for the execution of these Christian converts from Islam. The broadcast and response of the government caused protests on the streets of Kabul and in other Afghan cities. Hundreds of protesters shouted death threats against Christian converts and demanded the expulsion of Christian organizations because of their assumed Christian influence. Pressure on Afghan Christians intensified and dozens searched for safety in other neighborhoods or cities or fled the country. Several arrests and court cases of Christians have taken place in 2010¹³¹. In August, Christian aid workers were killed by the Taliban. Afghan Christians continue to suffer persecution and even violence from their families and others. In a unique situation in the history of the country, there is now a public debate over allowing Afghans to be Christians and have rights¹³².

4. Saudi Arabia

12 Filipino Christians and one priest were arrested while attending a religious service in a private home on October 1. They were charged with proselytizing and

¹³⁰ WWL: *Afghanistan*, [Online Available]

¹³¹ *From Protest to Prison – Iran One Year After the Election*, p.20

¹³² WWL: *Afghanistan*, op.cit.

temporarily released (one of them on bail)¹³³. In addition, a number of Christians fled the country because of oppression for faith-related reasons. In some cases their lives were at stake. Most Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates who live and work temporarily in the country. The majority of them are from the Philippines. These foreign workers, besides being exploited and poorly paid, are regularly exposed to verbal and physical violence because of their Christian faith. There are a number of converts from Islam who live their faith in the deepest secrecy¹³⁴.

No protection, legal or otherwise, is provided for non-Muslim residents. The legal system is based on Islamic law (sharia). Apostasy is punishable by death if the accused does not recant. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, the religious police, the “Muttawa” do not always respect this right. It was also this *Muttawa* which arrested the above mentioned 13 Christians in October. The public practice of non-Muslim worship is prohibited as well in Saudi Arabia. Worshippers who engage in such activities risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture. Believers from a Muslim Background also run the risk of honor killing if their family or others in their social environment discover their new faith¹³⁵.

5. Somalia

The situation for Christians in Somalia has worsened. A negative image of Christians was painted in the media, eight Christians were martyred and a quarter of the number of Christians fled the country. The republic of Somalia essentially has been in a state of civil war since 1991, and can be divided into self-declared independent Somaliland (North-West), autonomous Puntland (North-East) and

¹³³ *Two Indian Christians Languish in Saudi Prison*, [Online Available]

¹³⁴ *WWL: Saudi Arabia*, [Online Available]

¹³⁵ *WWL: Saudi Arabia*, Ibid.

Southern Somalia with the capital Mogadishu. While Somaliland and Puntland are rather stable, Southern Somalia is not, because of the Islamic militia's al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam fighting with the Transitional Government of the Republic and its ally Ahlu Sunnah Jama'a, backed by 6 000 African Union soldiers. Islamist al-Shabaab controls 90% of Southern Somalia, while the Transitional Government is restricted to a small part of the capital. Authoritarian Al-Shabaab is enforcing a harsh interpretation of sharia in the territories it controls. At present, this militia is extremely radical because of the external influence from al-Qaeda. Hence its support among the local population is waning. At the same time, al-Shabaab is effectively working to eradicate Christianity from the country¹³⁶.

6. Maldives

In the archipelago of the Maldives, Islam is the official state religion and all citizens must be Muslims. Persecution of Christians in the Maldives is systematic: legislation forbids the practice of any religion except Islam; the government regards itself as the protector and defender of Islam; Christian churches are forbidden; importing Christian materials is prohibited; discrimination of non-Muslims is total; social control is enormous and the average Maldivian agrees with the prohibition of any religion other than Islam. There is only a handful of indigenous believers who practice their faith individually and in extreme secrecy for fear of being discovered. No converts have been killed for apostasy in the Maldives. There were a few reports of foreign Christians who were detained and deported from the country after Christian materials had been found in their luggage¹³⁷.

¹³⁶ WWL: *Somalia*, [Online Available]

¹³⁷ WWL: *Maldives*, [Online Available]

7. Yemen

There are reports of Christians being killed for their faith in a previous *World Watch List*. Several Christian expatriates, who had resided in the country for many years, were deported from the country without any reason given¹³⁸.

The Yemeni Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that sharia is the source of all legislation. As long as expatriates do not evangelize, the Yemeni government does not intervene when they live out their faith, but Yemeni citizens are not allowed to convert to Christianity or other religions. Converts from an Islamic background may face the death penalty if their new faith is discovered. Converts from Islam also encounter opposition from extremist groups, who threaten “apostates” with death if they do not revert to Islam. Proselytizing of Muslims is prohibited¹³⁹.

It is estimated that there are several thousand Christians throughout the country. Most of them are expatriates (Westerners, South and East Asians, Arabs) or refugees (mainly Ethiopian). There are a few converts from Islam. In Aden there are a few churches, but in the north of the country no church buildings are allowed¹⁴⁰.

8. Iraq

Iraq had one of the biggest changes in this year’s WWL, moving up from the 17th position to the 8th place. The rise in position was caused by a high number of incidents of violence against Christians, which led to many injuries and deaths. In addition, more information was received regarding the number of kidnapped Christians and the number of Christians injured in specific anti-Christian attacks. Bomb attacks on churches in December 2009 caused as many as half the city’s

¹³⁸ *Yemen: Christians killed*, [Online Available]

¹³⁹ *Yemen*, [Online Available]

¹⁴⁰ *WWL: Yemen*, [Online Available]

Christian population to flee Mosul. Attacks against Christians increased considerably during the parliamentary elections. The violence started just before the expected elections of January 2010 and lasted until the actual elections at the beginning of March¹⁴¹.

The two main acts of violence against Christians in 2010 were the bomb attack on buses full of Christian students in May and the terrorist attack on the Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad at the end of October¹⁴². In the first incident, three Christian students were killed and 180 injured, many of whom are scarred or disabled for life. In the second, which has also been called “the deadliest attack against the local Christians since Islamic extremists began targeting them in 2003,” 58 Christians died and at least 60 were injured¹⁴³. At least 90 Christians have been killed throughout the reported period, including several other targeted killings of Christians in Mosul, Baghdad and Kirkuk.

About 334 000 Christians are left in Iraq. Most Christians are from traditional denominations such as Assyrian, Chaldean, Catholic, and Armenian, and there are several thousand evangelicals. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, their situation has deteriorated considerably. Violence against Christians is motivated by religious, political, financial and social reasons. Christians suffer from the anti-Western atmosphere in the country and are seen as collaborators with Westerners. As Western influence in the country is dwindling with the removal of many of their forces, extremists seize the opportunity to terrorize Christians and force them out of the country. The violence has caused hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, both Muslim

¹⁴¹ WWL: *Iraq*, [Online Available]

¹⁴² *Christians targeted in Iraq attacks*, [Online Available]

¹⁴³ *Two killed in Iraq attacks on Christian homes*, [Online Available]

and Christian, to leave the country, and many more are displaced inside Iraq, particularly in Kurdistan¹⁴⁴.

9. Uzbekistan

In the past, Christians were given fines as a penalty for breaking the law on religion¹⁴⁵, but currently short-term prison sentences (3-15 days) are given more frequently as punishment¹⁴⁶. In every town in Uzbekistan there is more pressure now than in the past. Almost no new registrations of churches have been issued; instead many churches have lost their registration and some have lost their buildings. Many times Protestant Christians are seen as a destabilizing influence in society. They experience pressure from various sides. The government arrests, fines, and imprisons them; society causes job loss and disconnects them from services; Islamic clergy and relatives pressure them with beatings, rejection, humiliation and often expulsion from the family home. The laws on religion are strict and proselytising is banned. Regularly, there is negative exposure on TV for Christians, and a hostile disposition of local authorities and court officials are factors that aggravate the situation for Christians in the country¹⁴⁷.

10. Laos

Laos is the only other Communist-ruled country in the top 10 of the WWL Together with North Korea. The church is relatively small but continues to grow numbering about 200 000 believers, mostly belonging to ethnic minorities. Persecution in Laos includes a few legislative restrictions. The government's attitude

¹⁴⁴ WWL: *Iraq*, op.cit.

¹⁴⁵ *Uzbekistan: Raids Increase in April*, [Online Available]

¹⁴⁶ *Uzbekistan: Believers Arrested*, [Online Available]

¹⁴⁷ WWL: *Uzbekistan*, [Online Available]

is very negative and restrictive towards Christians, and all believers are under strict surveillance¹⁴⁸ because they are regarded as agents for the USA to bring about political change in Laos for “democracy”. The church cannot operate freely and its activities in society are limited. Christians are restricted in their roles in the family and in the village. Christian converts who renounce evil spirit worship come under great societal pressure. From time to time believers are arrested, and many of them experience extreme physical and emotional pressure (torture) to renounce their faith¹⁴⁹. At the time of the report at least 25 Christians were killed and at least another 20 were arrested and held without trial. Christians were physically harassed on a regular basis and a number of churches were destroyed or damaged. Thousands of Christian Hmong refugees are living in Thailand. Despite the high level of persecution in Laos, there are many clandestine activities and the Church seems to be growing¹⁵⁰.

THE EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION ON THE CHURCH

Bisagno writes: “The book of Hebrews tells us that, like Joseph, Jesus chose to endure pain rather than enjoy the pleasures of the world for a season. Story after story in Scripture reveals the importance of expanding our horizons and seeking first the kingdom of God, rather than chasing what so appeals at the moment”¹⁵¹.

Few of us would sign up for a heavy dose of persecution, yet many feel that nothing would be as helpful for the Christian church today. The furnace of affliction, while not something we would seek, forges our character like nothing else. No wonder James wrote the words, “Consider it a great joy ... whenever you experience

¹⁴⁸ *Vietnam and Laos: Soldiers Attack Hmong Christians*, [Online Available]

¹⁴⁹ *Laos: Christians Evicted*, [Online Available]

¹⁵⁰ *WWL: Laos*, [Online Available]

¹⁵¹ Bisagno, p.49

various trials ...” Many of us could testify to the sustaining grace of God and the powerful development of our maturity after we have endured persecution for the sake of the Kingdom¹⁵².

An elderly Christian man in Communist-controlled Budapest remarked when asked about the effects of persecution and discrimination on the lives of Christians: “It is like the deep, fast-flowing Danube River. The banks of the river were artificially narrowed throughout the city of Budapest. As a result the river’s fast waters dug deeper and deeper into the river bottom.” Believers under restrictions and persecution have limited freedom and few political options, but their narrowed lives have found great depth by going deeper in Christ¹⁵³.

It is in the laws of the spiritual world that persecutions should always bring a violent reaction in favor of the principles of the persecuted. When Christianity is patronized it becomes corrupt. When, through persecution, it is thrown back upon the ground of its first principles, it springs up with new life and vigor¹⁵⁴.

However, that being said, persecution also has a devastating effect on believers that is not glorious and honorable at all. As Gooch wrote concerning the persecutions in Alexandria: “Then they [the mobs] ran in a body to the houses of the Christians, charged in by groups on those they knew as neighbors, raided, plundered, and looted. The church practically collapsed. Thousands of Christians either offered sacrifices or obtained a certificate (*libellus*) saying that they had sacrificed”¹⁵⁵.

Writing about the plight of Christians in Somalia, the *Somali Mission* states: “Persecution and church collapse occurred in the wake of the Lutheran mission expulsion. Although Jubba valley was until recently where most Somali Christians in

¹⁵² Bisagno, p.50

¹⁵³ Green, op.cit.

¹⁵⁴ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Acts of the Apostles Vol. I*, p.260

¹⁵⁵ Gooch, op.cit.

Somalia lived, that church is gone forever... The Muslim fundamentalist ambitions of eliminating the Somali church are far from being over. They followed those who took refuge to Kenya and the neighboring countries¹⁵⁶.

Persecution can and often does cause the church to disappear or at least become virtually invisible and unnoticed for a while, often a few decades.

Although believers may develop a strongly attested character during the pressure of persecution, they might also change into something very un-Christ like. I remember going to the Ukraine in 1997 to meet members of the so called underground Iron Curtain believers. For so many years we prayed for them and held them in high esteem for their sufferings because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Arriving there, I was astonished to find a rather selfish, seriously divided and elitist underground church. Believers denounced one another as fake because they belong to the “wrong” or “registered” denomination. Numerous accounts exist of “underground” Pentecostals and Baptists physically attacking one another, mutually accusing one another of being of the false church. Church-split after church-split occurred after the fall of Communism in 1991. Due to the isolation under Communism practically every church developed their own systematic theology which most often resulted in gross misinterpretations of the Bible.

Persecution as such does not purify a believer. It is only the revelation of Jesus Christ and obedience to that revelation that purifies a believer. Persecution does have the ability to exert enough pressure to halt the growth of the church and even exterminate it completely if it were not for God’s personal protection.

¹⁵⁶ *The Persecuted Christian Church in Somalia*, [Online Available]

Chapter Three

II. HELPING SURVIVORS COPE WITH THE EFFECTS OF SEVERE PERSECUTION

The illustrations of four Christian schoolchildren who were attacked in Indonesia on the 29 October 2005 are a harsh reminder of the reality of severe persecution. Three of the girls, Theresia Morangke (15 years old), Yarni Sambue (15 years old), and Alfita Poliwo (17 years old), were beheaded (Fig.4.1 and 4.2). The fourth girl (Fig.4.3), Noviana Malewa (15 years old), survived.

Their heads were found in bags on the steps of a church and along the road to a police station with the message, “We will murder 100 more Christian teenagers and their heads will be presented as presents.” Their bodies were discarded at different locations¹⁵⁷.



Fig.4.1¹⁵⁸



Fig.4.2

¹⁵⁷ *Sole Survivor of Muslim Beheading Attack to Receive Medical Treatment From VOM*, [Online Available]

¹⁵⁸ Pictures from Indonesia: *Sole Survivor of Muslim Beheading Attack to Receive Medical Treatment From VOM*, op.cit.



Fig.4.3

It could be considered inappropriate and insensitive to produce these graphic pictures here, but that is just the point. A mere academic discussion of ministering to the persecuted church disintegrates in the face of the horrific reality of what these people have to endure. This is their reality. In most cases an inescapable reality. These girls were attacked because they believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

The murdered girls' horror ended at their deaths, but Noviana Malewa still lives with the horror and so do her parents, friends and fellow Christians.

VOM reports:

“Unable to get a clean shot on Noviana, the attackers managed to slash the right side of her head from neck to cheek. The blow damaged nerves, resulting in the dislocation of Noviana’s lower jaw. She still suffers from severe pain in her head and jaw, and because of her loosened teeth, she cannot chew well. Noviana is having an examination and continued treatment this month through VOMedical. Noviana is still under the 24-hour protection of four policemen far from the scene. Because she is a key witness of the murders, with radical Muslims reportedly searching for her, the Christian survivor has been kept in a safe area. Witnesses of similar Muslim attacks on Christians in Indonesia have been shot. On May 10th, the Associated Press stated that all seven of the terrorists believed connected to the beheadings confessed their involvement”¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁹ *Sole Survivor of Muslim Beheading Attack to Receive Medical Treatment From VOM*, op.cit.

This attack on Christians in Indonesia is not a once off occurrence. It is a constant present danger. This danger exists for 100 million other believers around the world. How does one minister to these people?

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TRAUMA OF SEVERE PERSECUTION

A high percentage of torture and trauma survivors suffer from extreme levels of depression and anxiety, which manifest in many ways. According to Gavin Andrews, MD, of the *Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression*, symptoms of severely persecuted persons include post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD)¹⁶⁰.

PTSD is characterized by the development of a long-lasting anxiety response following a traumatic or catastrophic event and usually develops within 3-6 months of the event (although sometimes longer)¹⁶¹.

To treat patients suffering from PTSD, psychotherapists and other professionals engage in trauma counseling. To understand trauma counseling one has to understand the trauma that severely persecuted people suffer.

Australia is one of the countries in the world with the most extensive network of counseling and treatment centers for victims of torture and war trauma. Most of the survivors of torture and trauma that Australian agencies work with come to Australia as refugee or humanitarian entrants. About seven out of 10 refugees in Australia have been tortured or have experienced some kind of war-related trauma¹⁶². Typically, according to the *Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture or Trauma* (FASSTT)¹⁶³, their clients have had to flee from conflict, leaving home, possessions, family, friends and country behind, to walk long distances to find a safer place. Since

¹⁶⁰ Andrews, [Online Available]

¹⁶¹ Andrews, Ibid.

¹⁶² *Torture and trauma*, [Online Available]

¹⁶³ *Survivors Speak*, [Online Available]

the end of World War II, survivors of torture and trauma have migrated to Australia through the refugee, humanitarian and general immigration programs, fleeing conflicts in the Asia Pacific region, Africa, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. Between 1951 and 2006 more than 675 000 refugee and humanitarian program entrants, including their families, have settled in Australia.

No one knows the exact number of torture survivors now living in the United States, but estimates are high. Estimates for the number of survivors of torture living in the United States are based on studies, which that show 5% to 35% of refugees coming each year show signs of torture. In addition to these numbers, there are many others who come seeking asylum. Figures from the Office of Refugee Resettlement published in 2005, showed that from 1975 to 2005 – 2 511 061 refugees entered the United States. Estimations of the number of torture survivors in the United States are complicated. Studies of torture prevalence in refugee populations or even in national surveys are more abundant. Studies of national samples show a prevalence ranging from 8-30%, studies in near-area refugee settings from 3-16%, and studies in Western refugee settings from 18-76% (assuming that those who witnessed torture were considered torture victims as well). Too many uncertainties are attached to the measurements presented to allow clear general conclusions to be drawn; there are differences in assessment method, selection mechanisms, and composition of the study populations. However, the studies of composite refugee populations in Western settings can by various selection mechanisms show that the available estimates are relatively close, based upon large samples. In conclusion, 10-30% of refugees in Western settings are torture victims¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶⁴ *Facts & Figures*, [Online Available]

United Nations receives reports on acts of torture from more than 60 countries each year as well as evidence of government-sanctioned torture ranging from 100 to 130 countries¹⁶⁵. In 1997, Amnesty International reported torture and maltreatment in 115 out of 215 countries (53,5%)¹⁶⁶.

Encountering Evil

Dr. Andrea Northwood of *The Center for Victims of Torture* in Minneapolis, USA, describes severe persecution as “the human capacity for evil in a manner that goes beyond psychological explanations”¹⁶⁷. She recognizes the “failure of language in fully capturing or expressing trauma” derived from torture or severe persecution.

Torture can take many forms. It may be physical or psychological. FASSTT centers list as examples of torture “beatings, electric shock, sexual abuse, solitary detention, mock executions, sensory deprivations, being forced to witness others being tortured or killed, and detention in harsh and inhumane conditions”¹⁶⁸. Torture has no political, religious, cultural, gender, class or age boundaries. Children, women and men are all targets.

Article 1 of the United Nations *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* defines torture as:

Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence

¹⁶⁵ Knowles, [Online Available]

¹⁶⁶ Berliner, [Online Available]

¹⁶⁷ Northwood, [Online Available]

¹⁶⁸ *Torture*, [Online Available]

of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions¹⁶⁹.

The extracts below give some insight into the experiences of survivors of torture and trauma throughout the world.

“Before, when I could sympathize with the Vietnamese or with people who were tortured in Brazil, in my heart I felt that their stories were a bit exaggerated – how could they not be! But when we (in Chile) began to experience all this horror, I understood that it had all been true, that these things really do transpire between human beings” (*Moy de Toha, ‘The Soldier’s Friend’, in P. Politzer, Fear in Chile: Lives Under Pinochet, New York: Pantheon Books, 1989*)¹⁷⁰.

“Even before interrogation, I was brutally beaten. Afterwards, each question was systematically accompanied by punches, kicks, cigarette burns. Each of my replies provoked new blows. After the interrogation they hung me up, my body was suspended like a sandbag, defenseless against the kicks and punches of my interrogators. They entertained themselves by putting out their cigarettes on my body, which they used like an ashtray. They scored my back all over with the point of a knife” (*‘I am Timorese’, Testimonies from East Timor, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1990*)¹⁷¹

“It is different for women. Women have continuously these sexual harassments ... Yes, for women almost all the tortures are sexual. A lot of times, the soldiers start with raping a woman, before she is going to be interrogated” (*Filipino woman, in N. Schilders et al., Sexual Violence: You Have Hardly any Future Left, Amsterdam: Dutch Refugee Council, 1988*)¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *Torture, Ibid.*]

¹⁷⁰ *Survivors Speak, op.cit.*

¹⁷¹ *Survivors Speak, Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Survivors Speak, Ibid.*

“To threaten women with rape is the most popular thing that they use. The worst thing I was afraid of during the tortures was that they tried to rape me. That is the worst thing that can happen. It is for me the same thing as death” (*Turkish woman, in N. Schilders et al., Sexual Violence: You Have Hardly any Future Left, Amsterdam: Dutch Refugee Council, 1988*)¹⁷³

Various sources, including *Open Doors International*, mention events of severe persecution in Iraq over the last 5 years. One such report was about the kidnapping, torture, and death of a 29 year old Christian male¹⁷⁴. Yaqub’s body bore marks of dog bites and torture; his legs and arms were tied together and his clothes were covered in blood, according to the AFP. His eyes were gouged out, his ears were cut off and his face was skinned, according to the Assyrian International News Agency. His head was also almost totally severed.

The Christian community was “very shaken by the attack”, and it was feared that “many would leave the city as a result”¹⁷⁵.

The *New York Times* published a report in the same month exposing severe persecution in Iraq. Joséphine Anthoine-Milhomme, a French psychologist at the *Center for Victims of Torture* in Amman, has treated victims of war and natural disaster in Asia, Africa and Central America, but her 15 years of experience did not prepare her for the brutality described by Iraqis.

The events described in interviews have not been independently verified, but the clients were closely screened by the center and accepted only if their accounts were plausible and they had clear symptoms of trauma. Their stories are consistent with reports by medical groups that have interviewed other Iraqi torture victims, and

¹⁷³ *Survivors Speak*, Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ *Kidnappers Allegedly Called Murdered Iraqi Christian’s Employer*, [Online Available]

¹⁷⁵ *Kidnappers Allegedly Called Murdered Iraqi Christian’s Employer*, Ibid.

with accounts in documents revealed by *WikiLeaks* and reported in *The New York Times* and other publications¹⁷⁶.

Excerpts from a shopkeeper's testimony to employees at the center read:

During an interview here, the shopkeeper, 35, a balding, stocky man wearing a T-shirt and slacks, was calm and soft-spoken at first, but grew increasingly loud and agitated as he told his story. He described enduring episodes of torture, threats by captors to go to his house and rape his wife, and daily horrors like the suicide of a young prisoner who electrocuted himself with wires from a hot plate after being raped by soldiers.

The first time the Iraqi Army arrested him, he said, soldiers burst into his shop in Baghdad, dragged him out in handcuffs and a blindfold, and took him to a filthy, overcrowded prison. Beatings, rape, hunger and disease were rampant, and he expected at any moment to be killed. He was held for four months, until December 2008.

He was beaten repeatedly, kicked and hit with fists, sticks, chains and bats, sometimes while he was blindfolded and handcuffed.

At first he was kept in a cramped, dark cell by himself; later he was moved to another prison, where 150 men were crowded into a squalid room meant for 50. Food was scarce and foul. Toilets overflowed. They slept on the floor with shoes as pillows. Only some had blankets. Most caught dysentery and scabies.

Sometimes, as punishment, the water would be shut off for a week, so no one could wash. [According to the shopkeeper] "The filth and dirt were worse than being tortured".

Group activities were forbidden. He and other prisoners, caught praying together, were blindfolded, handcuffed and forced to perform knee bends for hours in time to a

¹⁷⁶ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, [Online Available]

whistle, or be whipped. Gradually, their legs swelled and some began to urinate blood, which can be a sign of kidney or muscle damage.

The shopkeeper's older brother paid a bribe to get his case moved to court, and finally, after four months, he was released. A year later, in 2009, Iraqi soldiers arrested him again. This time he was imprisoned for more than five months

Other victims' experiences (some of them even worse), correspond to those of the shopkeeper.

One victim reported being sent a video of captors killing a family member by drilling into his skull. An 11-year-old girl and her family revealed that she was raped by a group of men who then shaved her head and threw her on a trash heap. A toddler witnessed her father's murder; a schoolboy saw his teacher and classmates killed.

Another client at the center, a 37-year-old man who asked to be identified only as R., said that in 2009 he was kidnapped from a street in Mosul — blindfolded, handcuffed and thrown into the trunk of a car by assailants he thought were members of Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Speaking through a translator, he said he was taken because his sister's husband worked as an interpreter for the American forces; the husband had already been given asylum in the United States. A sign had been posted on their home: "This is the house of the interpreter."

He was held in a small room jammed full of prisoners, including a woman, Mariam, whose husband was an interpreter for the Americans. She was tortured in front of the other prisoners. The captors beat her, threw water and salt on her and tied her to metal bars that were attached to the wall and electrified via a generator.

"They raped her more than once in front of us," R. said, looking down as he spoke.

"We wanted to help her. We gave her water. But we could not help her, because they were there. I gave her water. She was probably Christian.

“And then she died, two or three days after she was raped. There were four guys who raped four of us. They asked for information about my sister’s husband.”

When R. said he had no information, the captors tortured him with electric shocks, using the same apparatus they had used on Mariam.

During the interview, R. stood up, turned and partly removed his shirt to reveal a fist-size lump between his shoulder blades — a result, he said, of having his hands tied behind his back and then jerked up and hung from a bar in the wall.

“I was tortured and raped more than once,” he said. “It feels as if something is missing. I don’t mingle at all with people.”

1. Effects of Torture and Trauma

Dr. Berliner observes: “...labeling torture survivors as having PTSD is much too inadequate a description of the complexity and magnitude of the effects of torture”¹⁷⁷. Torture has an impact on the individual, the family and the community. Refugees and other survivors of torture experience the impact of torture in many different ways. It has a profound, immediate and long-term impact on physical and psychological health.

High rates of torture and other forms of trauma have left many Iraqi refugees struggling with emotional wounds, some so severe that people are afraid to leave their homes. The *New York Times* quotes the *International Organization for Migration*, a group with 132 member countries, in saying that about 21% of Iraqis in Jordan were “severely traumatized” by attacks on them or their families¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁷ Berliner, [Online Available]

¹⁷⁸ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, [Online Available]

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is characterized by the development of a long-lasting anxiety response following a traumatic or catastrophic event and involves¹⁷⁹:

- (a) Images, dreams, or flashbacks of the traumatic event that are so vivid, it feels like the trauma is happening all over again.
- (b) Avoidance of cues which act as reminders of the traumatic event. Keeping thoughts and feelings separate – choosing only to think instead of feel. They may get anxious if they see or experience something that reminds them of their trauma, even if that object or activity isn't dangerous or threatening in itself.
- (c) Amnesia about important aspects of the traumatic event.
- (d) Intense arousal and anxiety on exposure to trauma cues.
- (e) Depressed or irritable mood, loss of interest in life and feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.
- (f) Social withdrawal. They may 'disconnect' from the world around them and seem to be mostly daydreaming. Some may stay home as much as they can, and avoid travelling and meeting new people.
- (g) Since many torturers are medical professionals, the person may stay away from hospitals, clinics, doctors, dentists and nurses. The person may try to avoid crowds, public places, authority figures and anyone who wears a uniform.
- (h) Concentration and memory difficulties.
- (i) Nightmares and disturbed sleep.
- (j) Being easily startled.

¹⁷⁹ Andrews, op.cit.

(k) Harmful ways of coping may include alcohol or drug abuse.

To this list *Better Health Channel* adds¹⁸⁰:

- (a) Headaches, unexplained skin rashes, stomach upsets and other complaints that don't seem to have a physical cause.
- (b) Shaking or trembling muscles.
- (c) Hearing loss.
- (d) Vision problems.
- (e) Nervousness.
- (f) Sexual problems.
- (g) Aggression.
- (h) Loss of full range of emotions.
- (i) Suicidal thoughts.
- (j) Some survivors of torture experience long term pain from soft tissue injuries.

Symptoms in children depend on the child's age, development and experience.

Generally, a child who has experienced torture or trauma may show symptoms which include¹⁸¹:

- (a) Having the same nightmare over and over.
- (b) Confusing reality with fantasy.
- (c) Inability to trust others, including their parents.
- (d) Feeling afraid of things, people or situations that don't present any threat.

¹⁸⁰ *Torture and trauma*, [Online Available]

¹⁸¹ *Torture and trauma*, Ibid.

- (e) Destroying toys.
- (f) Repetitive play.
- (g) Agitated, anxious behavior.
- (h) Problems at school, including antisocial behavior.
- (i) Stuttering and speech problems (a child who can't yet talk may show its stress in drawings or play).

Not surprisingly the counselors working with survivors of severe persecution share in the secondary effects of the suffering their clients endured. Ms. Muriel Genot, one of two psychologists from the *Center for Victims of Torture* in Amman, says that the clients' stories sometimes give the therapists nightmares.

"Sometimes I feel almost physical pain when I listen to a detailed explanation of what happened," Ms. Genot said. "I feel it at the level of the skin, almost like my skin is being stretched or removed". What hit her hardest, Ms. Genot said, was a public presentation by a torture victim who told his story in a matter-of-fact, emotionless way, and then said, "I wonder why they did it"¹⁸².

Dr. Gorman of the University of Illinois in Chicago writes: "The tendency for individuals, including health professionals, to withdraw from survivors of violence has been well documented... the medical or psychiatric interviewer is often emotionally unprepared to listen to the horrifying experiences of the survivor of torture"¹⁸³

TREATING TORTURE AND TRAUMA SURVIVORS

¹⁸² *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, op.cit.

¹⁸³ Gorman, [Online Available]

PTSD is often a chronic disorder associated with significant disability and handicap, affecting relationships, work, and physical health. Half recover within five years, the speed of recovery being greater for individuals who have received professional treatment¹⁸⁴. PTSD is described as a severe disorder that is very difficult to treat. Effective treatment involves helping the individual to systematically confront experiences, memories, and situations associated with the traumatic event. This treatment can result in intense emotional responses to memories of the trauma and requires considerable therapeutic skill¹⁸⁵.

Not only do survivors of severe persecution carry with them life-long physical scars and injuries, but they may also suffer immense psychological distress including depression, shame, anger, suicidal ideas, grief over loss of loved ones, guilt about informing on others, or guilt about giving in to the perpetrators and managing to survive when many others have died¹⁸⁶.

The question arises: How can talk therapy help victims of torture? They are not mentally ill, but they are damaged emotionally. For some, group therapy is enough according to Ms. Anthoine-Milhomme. At the *Center for Victims of Torture* in Amman, group sessions are run by the center's 14 psychosocial counselors, most from Jordan or Iraq, who also do some individual counseling. People with the most severe problems are referred to one of the two psychologists (Mss. Genot and Anthoine-Milhomme). The goal of their treatment, an approach called psychodynamic therapy, is not to help clients forget what happened but to make the memories less painful¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁴ Andrews, op.cit.

¹⁸⁵ Andrews, Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Andrews, Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, op.cit.

The approach involves intensive talk therapy specifically devised for survivors of torture, using group counseling or individual psychotherapy or both. The work requires a deft touch. Research shows that trained therapists can help survivors of torture, but that inept efforts to treat them can backfire. “If all you’re doing is bringing up disturbing memories,” Dr. Keller said, “you can do more harm than good”¹⁸⁸.

The therapists try to help people figure out which events disturbed them most, and why. Psychotherapy can help, but it cannot undo the damage. People find they are changed forever¹⁸⁹.

There are many ways to approach treatment for trauma, depending in large part on the symptoms and the counselor. Methods can range from behavioral modification aimed at teaching the body to let go of panic responses, to talk therapy to help a patient consciously work through unconscious reactions. Among the first concerns will be to establish a secure, sensible environment for future work, and a relationship of trust between the therapist and the patient¹⁹⁰.

The process of rebuilding a secure life and stable boundaries after traumatic events can be a matter of long, serious work. Trauma affects a patient on the deepest, least easily controlled levels of self, and changes the way a person understands and responds to the world. To recover from severe physical and emotional trauma can take many years¹⁹¹.

Alternative forms of trauma counseling include Acupuncture, Chiropractic, Massage Therapy, Qigong, Reiki, Shiatsu, Somatic Experiencing, Yoga, Zero Balancing¹⁹² and Martial Arts¹⁹³.

¹⁸⁸ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ *Approaches to Trauma Therapy*, [Online Available]

¹⁹¹ *Approaches to Trauma Therapy*, Ibid.

¹⁹² *Integrative Therapies*, [Online Available]

¹⁹³ *Using Martial Arts to fight PTSD*, [Online Available]

1. The Danish Model

According to Dr. Berliner the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department refers asylum seekers severely affected by symptoms of PTSD to the Red Cross Trauma Centre where different forms of psychosocial treatment are offered. Traditionally, treatment of trauma in Denmark has been based on psychodynamic analytic theoretical frameworks, involving long-term therapies with 50-100 sessions and great exposure to the trauma as a significant part of the treatment. As an alternative, the project conducted at the Danish Red Cross asylum center included a short-term therapeutic model, meaning that the torture survivors suffering from PTSD were offered eight sessions of treatment, each session consisting of two hours. The model comprised a combination of psychotherapy and relaxation therapy. It was believed that the short-term therapy model could reduce the torture survivors' symptoms of PTSD and thereby enhance their quality of life, because, instead of exposing the torture survivors to their respective traumas, the short-term therapy model emphasized techniques that: could give the client the possibility to regain control and distance from the traumatic experience; tried to uncover as many resources as possible in the client's past; reinforced the regaining of action potentials through talents/interests/abilities that are part of the client's potentials¹⁹⁴.

The following provides a brief overview of the different methods and techniques used during the eight session of the brief therapy treatment.

- (a) **Session 1** -The psychologist and the relaxation therapist introduce the course of treatment by informing the client about the potential

¹⁹⁴ Berliner, [Online Available]

perspectives of the treatment. The client is asked to account for the symptoms he is experiencing.

- (b) **Session 2** – This session is devoted to the establishment of *the safe place* in the client. *The safe place* is a place the client knows well and therefore is able to describe in detail. It is often closely associated with good memories and positive experiences from the client's life, such as school years, childhood, family gatherings etc. The idea behind the technique of *the safe place* is that the client can use it as a mental refuge whenever flashbacks and other repressive thoughts are troubling him. Also, *the safe place* can be used in meditation and relaxation exercises, and when the client tries to go to sleep.
- (c) **Session 3** – Here the focus is on the actual symptoms that the client is experiencing, but in some cases it can be too difficult for the client to speak of his thoughts and feelings regarding the trauma. As an alternative, treatment can focus on the physical pain the client is experiencing, because the body and the physical pain are perceived to contain a narrative about the trauma. By getting the client to either talk about his current physical condition or by getting him to draw his pain, a narrative about the traumatic experiences slowly begins to emerge.
- (d) **Session 4** – The work is focused on the traumatic experiences in the client's past, and the technique of *the safe place* is used frequently as a way for the client to control his memory. At this point, a more narrative approach is adopted, which focuses on verbally constructing the meaning of the traumatic incidence from the client's past in order for him to view his personal life-story/narrative in relation to a larger

discursive framework such as religion, politics, ethics, etc. Thus the discursive framework represents a larger more meaningful narrative in the client's life.

- (e) **Sessions 5, 6** – Continuing to work with the themes and techniques introduced in the previous sessions.
- (f) **Sessions 7, 8** – These sessions focus on the future and concern the question of how the client wishes to feel in two years. Focus is on the client's ability to use *the safe place* in order to control his bodily reactions as well as his thoughts and feelings associated with the trauma.

Concluding his comments on the Danish model, Berliner writes: “The case showed the significance of not only focusing on symptom reductions, as it illustrated how the intervention strategies should strengthen the client's abilities to cope with the complexities of his problems on a daily basis. The evaluation of the brief therapy model showed that even though the clients did not experience notable symptom reductions, many had found new and better ways of dealing with the pain”¹⁹⁵.

2. The Wits Model

Particularly important to this study are the findings of the Wits Trauma Counseling Model. The Wits Trauma Model is a brief-term integrative psychotherapy intervention used for the treatment of psychological trauma. The model consists of five components which can be introduced interchangeably, depending on the needs of the client¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹⁵ Berliner, Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Hajjiyannis, [Online Available]

- (a) **Telling/retelling the story.** This involves the client giving a detailed description of the traumatic incident in sequence, including facts, feelings, thoughts, sensations, as well as imagined or fantasized aspects. This allows the client to give expression to the often unexpressed feelings and fantasies connected with the trauma which are often adaptively inhibited during life-threatening situations.
- (b) **Normalizing the symptoms.** This comprises obtaining information about symptoms as well as anticipation of symptoms. The client's symptoms are discussed and empathized with, while at the same time providing education about post-traumatic stress symptoms.
- (c) **Addressing survivor guilt or self-blame.** In this phase, feelings of self-blame or survivor guilt need to be explored. In many cases survivor guilt may not be present but in practically every case, there are feelings of self-blame. Self-blame may represent a wish to retrospectively "undo" the trauma and restore a sense of control. Self-blame may also relate to the belief that the person could have done more to prevent what happened.
- (d) **Encouraging mastery.** In this phase of the model the counselor assists the client to carry on with the tasks of daily living and to restore the client to previous levels of coping. One of the most important aspects of coping is adequate support; therefore the counselor encourages building and mobilizing existing support.
- (e) **Facilitating creation of meaning.** The final stage of the model is optional and only pursued if the client raises meaning issues. In assisting a client with establishing meaning out of a particular event, it

requires the counselor to engage with the client's belief system, be this on a cultural, political, spiritual or existential level. Work in this area is designed to be respectful of the client's existing beliefs and experience, while at the same time assisting the client in deriving some meaning from the event in a way which engenders hope and some future perspective. In essence, this phase of the intervention model can be understood as enhancing the client's ability to understand him/herself as a survivor rather than a victim.

Limitations to this model include¹⁹⁷:

- (a) The model is based on the assumption that clients have sufficient ego strength. Problems have been encountered when working with clients who are still reliving events, are highly anxious and who display regressive features.
- (b) In addition, the model assumes a level of verbal ability and thus needs to be adapted for use in clients with limited verbal skills.
- (c) Research suggests that counseling trauma survivors evokes strong transference¹⁹⁸ and countertransference¹⁹⁹ reactions. The nature of trauma is such that intense emotions are aroused soon after the counseling process has been initiated. Clients often develop positive (or negative) introjects and dependency on the counselor. The short term nature of the model precludes the possibility of adequately

¹⁹⁷ Hajjiannis, Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ In a therapy context, transference refers to redirection of a patient's feelings for a significant person to the therapist. Transference is often manifested as an erotic attraction towards a therapist, but can be seen in many other forms such as rage, hatred, mistrust, parentification, extreme dependence, or even placing the therapist in a god-like or guru status (*Transference*, Wikipedia)

¹⁹⁹ Countertransference is defined as redirection of a therapist's feelings toward a patient, or more generally, as a therapist's emotional entanglement with a patient (*Countertransference*, Wikipedia)

addressing these aspects of the therapeutic process, which can impact on both the counselor and the client.

(d) A major shortcoming of the model's application has been identified in relation to counseling the elderly. All counselors experienced difficulties when working with this age group. Problems encountered in the elderly included rigid thought patterns and coping skills, clinical depression, cognitive and memory impairment, physical injuries, inadequate support networks and practical difficulties. A prominent feature of trauma in this age group is the experience of profound despair and hopelessness which counselors have found resistant to treatment. These problems are not viewed as a fault of the model but rather due to the ageing process.

(e) The model is not perceived to adequately address the resolution of anger in traumatized clients. In many cases, counselors were of the opinion that clients had resorted to maladaptive ways of dealing with their anger.

3. Increasing the Damage

However, not all techniques are helpful. Scott Lilienfeld, a professor of psychology at Emory University, points out that some types of psychological first aid may help those who have lived through traumas, but others can actually cause harm²⁰⁰. One such technique is known as "critical incident stress debriefing", often used by counselors who travel to disaster sites. Research finds that some versions of

²⁰⁰ Szalavitz, [Online Available]

this technique may double the chances that a trauma victim will suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)²⁰¹.

How could the counseling of survivors immediately after experiencing trauma possibly backfire? Lilienfeld's response:

No one knows for sure why it's not a good idea, but given what the research shows, [some kinds of debriefing can be harmful]. It usually involves putting people in groups very shortly after the traumatic event and strongly encouraging them to "Get their feelings out" and "Talk about it" and so on. In classic debriefing, they almost prescribe symptoms, saying things like "Don't be surprised if you start feeling X, Y or Z" or "There's a good chance you'll have nightmares or flashbacks." There's some speculation that that [in itself] might bring some of the symptoms on, so I'm not sure that's a great idea.

The research shows that [this type of debriefing is] probably at best ineffective and may actually be harmful in some cases. [It's not clear why]. Some of what happens is that you have to respect individual coping mechanisms. Some people are ready to talk and some prefer not to talk. One problem with classic debriefing is that it often strongly encourages or urges people to talk about emotional memories that they may not really want to talk about. It's best to kind of leave it alone.

[Another] thing we know is that if you want to deal with anxiety, you have to allow anxiety to peak first and then pass, and give people enough opportunity to fully process it. [These techniques] may bring up some anxiety and increase it, maybe even bring up new anxieties and not really resolve them or even make them worse.

But one recent paper claimed that the evidence of harm [from debriefing] was overstated, so there is still some controversy over whether it's useless or actively

²⁰¹ Szalavitz, Ibid.

harmful — but even these authors admit that when used sloppily, [debriefing] probably is harmful²⁰².

D. CONCLUSION

Is additional ministry for believers who suffer from severe persecution needed? We need to take into account some of the important observations made by professionals in the field of counseling the severely traumatized.

- (a) Of the 216 countries in the world (including the newly formed South Sudan²⁰³) the UN has reported on acts of government-sanctioned torture ranging from 100-130 countries.
- (b) Severe persecution goes beyond psychological explanations, and human language fails in fully capturing or expressing the trauma that people experience. The medical or psychiatric interviewer is often emotionally unprepared to listen to the horrifying experiences of the survivor of torture and severe persecution.
- (c) Although PTSD is described as a severe disorder that is very difficult to treat, labeling torture survivors as merely having PTSD is much too inadequate a description of the complexity and magnitude of the effects of torture or severe persecution. Whereas the treatment of PTSD involves helping the individual to systematically confront experiences, memories, and situations associated with the traumatic event, survivors of torture and severe persecution need something more.

²⁰² Szalavitz, Ibid.

²⁰³ South Sudan, [Online Available]

- (d) Survivors of severe persecution are not mentally ill, but they are damaged emotionally. Trauma counseling in general aspires not to help clients forget what happened, but to make the memories less painful. But research has shown that inept efforts to treat them can backfire. Psychotherapy can help, but it cannot undo the damage. People find they are changed forever. Many clients, especially the elderly experience profound despair and hopelessness which counselors have found resistant to treatment.
- (e) Some models (like the Danish and Wits Models) attempt to address the issue of meaning linked to a bigger picture in order for the client to view his personal life-story/narrative in relation to a larger discursive framework such as religion, politics, ethics, etc. Thus the discursive framework represents a larger more meaningful narrative in the client's life. In assisting a client with establishing meaning out of a particular event, it requires the counselor to engage with the client's belief system, be this on a cultural, political, spiritual or existential level leading the client to derive some meaning from the event in a way which engenders hope and some future perspective.
- (f) However, even these models find that they cannot effectively treat the resentment, anger, and rejection derived from the clients' experiences. In many cases, counselors were of the opinion that clients had resorted to maladaptive ways of dealing with their anger.

Chapter Four

III.BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON PERSECUTION

The revelation of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation, although affirming the New Testament persecution teaching, goes much deeper than any of the teachings in the rest of the New Testament.

It gives rise to the realization that severe persecution needs a very special ministry and teaching – something for which most of the unpersecuted Christian world is unprepared and unequipped.

Believers are adequately taught by Jesus and the apostles concerning what to expect regarding persecution, as well as the reason for persecution, but Jesus considered it necessary to appear to John on Patmos for a special message to the severely persecuted church. It is this message that emphasises the need to compile a counseling model for those suffering under severe persecution.

Although the passages mentioned in this chapter are discussed at length in various books and articles concerning the exact meaning and application of each passage in scripture, the following list gives a brief outline of the major teachings on the subject.

Firstly the Bible teaches several important truths concerning the tribulations of believers. First, the tribulations of Christ are the pattern for the sufferings of believers (Matthew 13:21; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 8:35; 12:12; 1Thessalonians 3:3; 2Thessalonians 1:4; Revelations 1:9).

Secondly, the tribulations of believers are in a sense participation in the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24; 2Corinthians. 1:5; 4:10; Philippians 3:10; 1Peter 4:13).

Thirdly, the tribulations of believers promote transformation into the likeness of Christ (Romans 5:3; 2Corinthians 3:18; 4:8–12, 16). Tribulation teaches Christ's followers to comfort and encourage others in similar situations, enabling those suffering to persevere and persist (2Corinthians 1:4; 4:10; Colossians 1:24; 1Thessalonians 1:6)²⁰⁴. Wiersbe writes about a comment a believer in Poland made about the need for persecution. He said: "We are praying for you Christians in the Western world because you have it too easy. The Lord must help you not to compromise",²⁰⁵.

Using Kruis' outline of New Testament teaching on the topic of persecution²⁰⁶ we will endeavor to capture the essence of pre-Revelation teaching on the subject.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the differences and similarities of what is said about persecution in the book of Revelation and the pre-Revelation New Testament teaching on the subject. There are no contradictions, however.

PRE-REVELATION NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING REGARDING PERSECUTION

Persecution is not a mere spiritual exercise. It is not glorious and it is not accompanied by a soft warm feeling in the heart making you feel very special and spiritual. People who triumph in persecution do not triumph because they are persecuted, but because they see something else that is stronger than the horrors of persecution.

²⁰⁴ Brand, p.1624

²⁰⁵ Wiersbe, [electronic ed.]

²⁰⁶ Kruis, [electronic ed.]

Paul relates some of the persecutions he had to endure. They included (2Corinthians 11:23–27) being “in prison more frequently” (ἐν φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως). We know that Paul was imprisoned five times, but Clement of Rome mentioned seven times²⁰⁷. Prison conditions are described by the Harper’s Bible Dictionary as harsh and brutal.

Most prisoners wore chains; their feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that jailers sometimes employed such practices. ...Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24). Prisons often were very dark; the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows. Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin, and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives. Although various rulers, especially in Roman Imperial times, struggled to prevent such abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions undoubtedly varied considerably from place to place²⁰⁸.

Paul speaks of being “flogged more severely” (πληγαῖς ὑπερβαλλόντως) or receiving “countless floggings” (NRSV). Floggings or πληγή were beatings which caused wounds and severe pain. The Greek word is also used to describe a pandemic

²⁰⁷ Robertson, [electronic ed.].

²⁰⁸ Achtemeier, p.824

disease (hence the English word *plague*) or distress and great suffering as in Revelation 9:18; 18:4²⁰⁹.

Paul was “exposed to death again and again”. Five times he received 39 lashes from the Jews. He was “beaten with rods” three times, once he was “pelted with stones” (NIV), and three times shipwrecked. He spent a night and a day in the open sea and had been “in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers”. He adds this: “I have... often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked (NIV)”.

The violence and injustice of the above persecutions and afflictions Paul had to endure was immense.

1. Jesus’ Teachings Regarding Persecution

(a) Christians should expect persecution

(i) Matthew 10:17

“But when they deliver you up...”

“But *when* they deliver you up” contrasts starkly with “but *if* they deliver you up”. Jesus informs his disciples to expect to be delivered up. No surprises here!

(ii) Mark 10:29-30

“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake... who shall not receive... persecutions...”

²⁰⁹ Swanson, op.cit.

(iii) Luke 21:12

“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake”.

(iv) Luke 21:16-17

“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake”.

(v) John 15:20

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”.

(b) Why do people persecute Christians

(i) John 15:18–21

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (v.19). “They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the one who sent me” (v.21).

The Message Bible reads:

“If you lived on the world’s terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God’s terms and no longer on the world’s terms, the world is going to hate you... They are going to do all these things to you because of the way they treated me, because they don’t know the One who sent me”.

(ii) John 16:3

“And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me”.

(c) Desired behavior when being persecuted

(i) Matthew 5:38–42

Believers who are being persecuted should not resist (μὴ ἀντιστῆναι NA27) those who persecute them. μὴ ἀντιστῆναι means to “not be hostile toward”²¹⁰ or return the persecutors deeds on them. The concept of suffering hostility instead of being hostile, even enduring unjust suffering to honor God as the ultimate judge, is emphasized. Jesus’ admonition is clear:

“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (vv.39-42).

Jesus is not so much revoking a standard for justice as admonishing his followers not to make use of it; we qualify justice with mercy because we do not need to avenge our honor. Jesus calls for this humble response of faith in God; God alone is the final arbiter of justice, and we must trust him to fulfill it²¹¹.

(ii) Matthew 5:12

“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven..”

²¹⁰ Louw, p.20

²¹¹ Keener, [electronic ed.]

The reason for rejoicing is not *for* the persecution, but *because of* the persecution. The believer is to be “greatly rewarded in heaven” by the Father.

(iii) Matthew 5:44–45

“...But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father 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”.

The three fold instruction includes to bless, to do good, and to pray for those who persecute you.

Jesus discloses the reason why this is the desired reaction of believers towards persecutors. Believers are required to act in accordance with their Father in heaven. From this passage it appears that sonship is not only based on receiving the right from God to be his children, based on the acceptance of the person and work of Jesus (John 1:12), but also on acting like the Father. It is in action that the proof of sonship is evident.

(iv) Matthew 10:16

Jesus calls for his disciples to be harmless (innocent, pure) and wise.

φρόνιμος (wise) compares the doer of the Word to the wise builder who builds his house on a rock. The wise servant throws himself into the situation in which he is set, taking directions from his master. Similarly the Christian who sets Christ wholly before him is wise. In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1) wisdom is preparedness. Everything depends on the actual encounter with the Lord. There is also

a need for cannyness. Cleverly resolute action is imposed by the hopelessness of the situation and the resultant urgency²¹² for a resolution.

ἀκέρατοι translating innocent and without deception²¹³ also has the idea of being unmixed such as we find in Romans 16:19²¹⁴. To be innocent of evil, having no part in evil and be morally mixed between the character of God and that of Satan.

(v) Matthew 10:17–20

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you”.

(vi) Luke 21:13-14

“But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer...”

(vii) Luke 21:18-19

“But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls”.

These words of Jesus have confused many. Some interpret these phrases as speaking of spiritual realities in a believer’s life. Ultimately, even though a believer dies, he or she will be protected eternally by God. However, it appears that Jesus was speaking here of salvation as entering into the kingdom alive. Walvoord explains: “To ‘save yourselves’ by ‘standing firm’ means that believers show that they are members

²¹² Kittel, p.234

²¹³ Aland, p.24

²¹⁴ Swanson, [electronic ed.]

of the believing community in opposition to those who turn away from the faith during times of persecution”²¹⁵.

It is interesting that Jesus tells these followers that “not a hair of your head will perish”, since he has just told them that some of them will be killed. Jesus apparently intends here to teach that no one can ultimately hurt his disciples, who by “standing firm ... will gain life”. This is life which persecution and even martyrdom cannot destroy²¹⁶.

Butler highlights another interesting factor of what Jesus is saying to his followers. The flip side of God’s protection is endurance. He expands Jesus’ words: “You are to remain true to me through all persecution and catastrophe. Only by such perseverance can you gain your life for eternity. Remember, I warned you these things were coming. Keep the faith. Trust me through everything. Stay under God’s protection”²¹⁷. In these words we see that God’s promise of protection is far above immunity from mere bodily harm²¹⁸.

Other translations quote these words of Jesus:

“Not a hair of your head shall perish. You shall be in the Father’s hand, saved, even if put to death, gaining eternally by suffering” (PNT).

“Staying with it—that’s what is required. Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry; you’ll be saved” (TMB).

“But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives” (ESV).

“Deur julle volharding moet julle julleself red” (Translated: Through perseverance save yourselves – AV83).

²¹⁵ Walvoord, pp. 926-27

²¹⁶ Black, [electronic ed.]

²¹⁷ Butler, p.352

²¹⁸ Jamieson, [electronic ed.]

Although Greek texts agree on the wording of Luke 21:19, there is confusion among the manuscripts about whether the verb is an imperative (κτήσασθε, *Gain!*) or a future indicative (κτησεσθε, *you will gain*). Robertson uses the latter, indicating the future middle of κταομαι, to acquire and renders the translation to mean: “they will win their souls even if death does come”²¹⁹. However, Stein argues that the manuscript evidence favors the former so we probably should interpret this as an exhortation (an imperative) rather than an encouraging word (an indicative)²²⁰.

(d) Some might fall away when persecuted

(i) Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21

“Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root... The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away”.

There is something important to be noted here about people falling away because of persecution. The seed is the Word of God (Lk. 8:11) and those compared to rocky soil receive it with gladness. Utley writes:

“This was obviously a superficial response to Jesus and His message as the context shows. True salvation is an initial response of repentance and faith followed by an ongoing response of repentance and faith (cf. I John. 2:19)²²¹

²¹⁹ Robertson, op.cit.

²²⁰ Stein, p.518

²²¹ Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, p.119

However, one has to disagree with Utley as to the superficial response he says is evident from the context. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the peoples' response, but rather the problem is the stability of the relationship. The rocky ground is those who receive the Word with gladness but have "no root in themselves". Jesus describes the soil as shallow. The receivers of the Word do so with sincerity and joy, but are being afflicted and persecuted (λίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ) on account of the Word (διὰ τὸν λόγον). These receivers are not yet properly grounded in Christ Jesus and sway under the pressures of persecution.

Wiersbe points out that the English word "tribulation" comes from a Latin word *tribulum* as seen in the Latin translation of this phrase in Matthew 13:21 (*facta autem tribulatione* Vulgate). A *tribulum* was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the grain. The *tribulum* was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff²²². Another interesting addition to the meaning of *tribulum* is the Roman tax system. The main direct tax for Palestine, for example, was the *tribulum soli* or tax on the soil. The rate of this tax was probably about 12% of the total crop²²³. Using affliction and tribulation together in this sentence, Jesus focuses on the severity that greets these joyous receivers, but their relationship with Jesus is still immature and shallow (John 15:4) and unable to sustain the pressure.

The effect of λίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ is evident in passages such as Acts 8:4. Because of the afflictions and persecutions, people were scattered abroad (οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρηντες NA27)²²⁴. The focus is not on the manner in which the believers received the Word, but on what happened to them directly thereafter and how they responded to it. Brown is right in describing them as people who "cannot meet the

²²² Wiersbe, [electronic ed.]

²²³ Fiensy, p.87

²²⁴ Robertson, op.cit.

challenge of suffering and persecution”, but he is wrong in classifying them as “opportunists”²²⁵

The believers in Mat 13:21 are immediately *offended* (εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζεται NA27) because of the persecution and afflictions on account of the Word. However, it is doubtful if superficiality has anything to do with the offence. The pressure of the persecution together with the lack of a mature relationship with Jesus enhances the offence. It is an offence that comes from the question: “Why doesn’t God keep me from these afflictions and persecutions?” This was perhaps the struggle of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:6. The phrase “μακάριός ἐστιν ὃς ἐὰν μὴ σκανδαλισθῇ ἐν ἐμοί” (NA27) suggests that John was either in danger of mistakenly being offended by Jesus or already had been – thus the warning from Jesus.

“And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

John was in a situation of affliction and persecution and in danger of losing his life. Where is the Christ? Why doesn’t Jesus save him? Is He really the Christ? This is the process of offence at its best.

Interesting to see Jesus’ words: “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me”. This is incidentally also the same message conveyed in the beginning of the book of Revelation.

(e) How does God respond to those being persecuted

(i) Matthew 5:10–12

There is a great reward in heaven for every disciple of Christ who is being afflicted and persecuted “for righteousness’ sake”.

²²⁵ Brown, [electronic ed.]

(ii) Luke 21:15

“...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.

(iii) Luke 21:18

“But not a hair of your head shall be lost”.

As pointed out already in the previous section these words do not mean that Christians will never be harmed. Rather it conveys the message that whatever happens to them will be under the supervision of the Father.

2. Paul’s Teaching Regarding Persecution

(a) Christians should expect persecution

(i) 2Timothy 3:12

“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”.

(b) Why do people persecute Christians

(i) 1Corinthians 4:13b

“We have been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now”.

The NIV says:

“We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment”.

The attitude of the persecutors is clear. They slander, they afflict and they misinform to make the believers seem to be “the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world”. This makes their actions against believers justifiable in the eyes of the people.

(ii) Galatians 4:29

“But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now”.

Torrey describes this verse as “men by nature addicted to persecution”²²⁶.

(iii) 2Timothy 3:10–14

Evil men and impostors are responsible for persecuting the saints.

(c) Desired behavior when persecuted

(i) Romans 12:14, 17-21

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”.

Exactly what is God here requiring of us? Cottrell writes²²⁷:

Not just to endure persecution, not just to refrain from striking back at our persecutors, and not even just to refrain from wishing them harm. Rather, he is

²²⁶ Torrey, [electronic ed.]

²²⁷ Cottrell, [electronic ed.]

requiring us to pray a prayer of blessing for our persecutors – to ask God to bestow his favor upon someone.

But how is this possible? The very fact that persecution is so unreasonable and unfair makes it seem inevitable and natural for its victims to have feelings of animosity and vindictiveness toward its perpetrators.

We should note that Paul is not giving us a new teaching on this subject, but is just passing along commands already uttered by Jesus Christ such as those found in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:28.

(ii) 1Corinthians 4:12-13a

“...Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat”.

λοιδορούμενοι (NA27) translates as “being slandered” and accentuates the pressure on the believers under which they are to behave in quite the opposite spirit. In the New Testament the word translates malicious accusation (1Timothy 3:11, *diabolos*), speaking against (2Corinthians 12:20; 1Peter 2:1, *katalalia*) or even defaming (Romans 3:8, *blasphēmeō*)²²⁸. Δυσφημούμενοι (NA27) translates as “being defamed” meaning to speak injuriously²²⁹. The Textus Receptus uses βλασφημούμενοι (Stephens) which is used for any contumelious speech, reviling, calumniating, railing at etc²³⁰.

²²⁸ Wood, p.1150

²²⁹ Vine, p.285

²³⁰ Vine, p.131

Being receivers of such treatment from fellow humans, the disciples give the opposite. When slandered against they act kindly (εὐλογοῦμεν NA27) and when defamed they strive to appease by entreaty (παρακαλοῦμεν NA27)²³¹.

(iii) 2Thessalonians 3:2

“...and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith”.

Pray for those who are being persecuted that God might deliver them.

(iv) 2Timothy 1:8–9

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began”.

Do not be ashamed of those being persecuted but share their pain and afflictions.

(v) 2Timothy 2:3

Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

(vi) 2Timothy 2:8–10

²³¹ Vincent, [electronic ed.]

Endure persecution for the sake of those who might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

(vii) 1Thessalonians 3:2–4

No one should be shaken by these afflictions; because we know we are appointed for these.

(d) Some might fall away when persecuted

(i) Galatians 6:12

Some compromise so as not to be persecuted.

(e) How does God respond to those being persecuted

(i) 2 Co 1:10

“...who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us”.

God can and does deliver from persecution.

(ii) 2Thessalonians 1:6

God will punish those who persecute.

(iii) 2Timothy 4:6–8

Paul is to receive the “crown of righteousness”, which the Lord as the righteous Judge will give him at the completion of the journey.

3. John's Teaching Regarding Persecution

(a) Why do people persecute Christians

(i) 1John 3:1

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him”.

(ii) 1John 3:12–14

People's works are evil just as Cain's works were evil. They abide in death and do not want to have fellowship with life.

4. Peter's Teaching Regarding Persecution

(a) Why do people persecute Christians

(i) 1Peter 4:3–4

The world thinks it strange that disciples of Christ do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation. Hence they speak evil of them. From evil speaking eventually flow evil deeds.

(b) Desired behavior when persecuted

(i) 1Peter 3:13–14

A simple encouragement to not be afraid nor be troubled when threatened.

(ii) 1Peter 4:13, 16

Rejoice in the privilege of being allowed to partake of Christ's sufferings. Do not be ashamed, but glorify God in this matter.

Ignatius of Antioch's letters give us rare insight into the mind of a martyr concerning Peter's encouragement. Ignatius died in 117 AD. According to tradition he died in the Colosseum. He wanted to die and considered his death an imitation of the passion of Christ and an atoning sacrifice. He wrote a letter to Rome to be sure they did nothing to secure his release²³².

(iii) 1Peter 4:19

“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator”.

To commit their souls (παρατιθεσθωσαν αρατιθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς NA27) means to deposit or entrust, the word used by Jesus as he died (Luke 23:46)²³³. It contains the nature of Jesus' words in Luke 12:4-5 when He said: “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”.

The persecutors may harm the body and even annihilate it, but they can never touch the soul for it belongs to God.

(c) How does God respond to those being persecuted

(i) 1Peter 4:5

God will judge the persecutors.

(ii) 1Peter 4:13-14

²³² Gooch, “Martyrs and Confessors” [electronic ed.]

²³³ Robertson, op.cit.

When God's glory is revealed, persecuted believers will be filled with an exceeding joy. The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon those being persecuted.

5. Teaching Regarding Persecution in Acts

(a) Why do people persecute

(i) Acts 26:9–11

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth...”

People persecute because they display a misplaced zeal that is born out of ignorance and alienation from God.

(b) Desired reaction

(i) Acts 4:18–20

Peter and John chose to stand firm in the face of affliction and remain obedient to God rather than bear the consequences of disobedience to God to avoid persecution.

(ii) Acts 5:29, 41-42

Peter and the other apostles declared their willingness to suffer for their obedience to Christ rather than obeying men and be disobedient to God. The Jewish council had them beaten and the disciples departed from their tormentors “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”. They also did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”.

(iii) Acts 7:60

Stephen demonstrated the Spirit of Christ in the midst of his persecution when “cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin’. And when he had said this, he fell asleep”.

(iv) Acts 16:25

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them”.

(v) Acts 21:12–13

Paul adamant in fulfilling his calling in Christ even if it meant he would be killed. His words: “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” demonstrate just that.

SUMMARY OF PRE-REVELATION NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON PERSECUTION

1. Persecution is to be Expected

Matthew 10:17; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 21:12; Luke 21:16-17; John 15:20;
1Thessalonians 3:2–4; 2Timothy 3:12;

2. People Persecute Christians Because

(a) People are of the world and not of God

John 15:18–21; 1Corinthians 4:13b;

(b) Christians do not do the things people of the world does

1Peter 4:3–4

(c) People are evil

2Timothy 3:10–14; 1John 3:12–14, and

(d) People don't know the Father

John 16:3; 1John 3:1

(e) Worldly men are addicted to persecution

Galatians 4:29, and

(f) Misplaced zeal

Acts 26:9–11

3. Desired behavior when being persecuted

(a) Do not be hostile towards persecutors – God is the only Judge

Matthew 5:38–42; Romans 12:14, 17–21; Acts 4:18–20

(b) Rejoice in your reward in heaven

Matthew 5:12; Acts 5:29, 41–42; Acts 16:25; 1Peter 4:13, 16

(c) Bless those who persecute you

Matthew 5:44–45; Romans 12:14, 17–21; 1Corinthians 4:12–13a

(d) Pray for those being persecuted

Matthew 5:44–45; Acts 7:60

(e) Be harmless and wise

Matthew 10:16

(f) Do not worry or be ashamed

Matthew 10:17–20; Luke 21:13–14; 2Timothy 1:8–9; 1Peter 3:13–14

(g) Endure to the end

Luke 21:18–19; Acts 4:18–20; Acts 21:12–13; 2Timothy 2:3, 8–10; 1Peter 4:19

4. Some Might Fall Away When Persecuted

Matthew 13:5–6, 20–21; Galatians. 6:12

5. God responds to those being persecuted

(a) God rewards those who remains faithful

Matthew 5:10–12; 2Timothy 4:6–8

(b) God provides wisdom in the situation

Luke 21:15;

(c) God is in control even if believers are murdered

Luke 21:18;

(d) God can and does deliver from persecution

2 Co 1:10

(e) God will punish persecutors

2Thessalonians 1:6; 1Peter 4:5

(f) God's Spirit rests on those being persecuted

1Peter 4:13-14

Chapter Five

V. OVERVIEW OF REVELATION

Throughout the ages the book of Revelation has raised thorny issues concerning interpretation. This is quite evident in the different official views of interpretation of the book. Why is the book so seemingly difficult to interpret?

In order to work on a counseling model for ministering to the severely persecuted based on the book of Revelation, it is important to define one's view of interpretation. As it will become clear in this chapter, the original purpose of the book to the original recipients is the basis that should be used. Elements of the other views of interpretation are included. However, the content of the book supercedes merely one view of interpretation.

AN OVERVIEW ON THE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION

The key to any attempt at interpretation is the question "How did its original readers interpret the message?" As Ralph Bass puts it: "One thing is certain, the original readers of the book of Revelation did not say to themselves, 'This book is not for us, it contains a prophecy of what the church will someday experience hundreds, even thousands of years in the future'"²³⁴.

Any prophecy or statement in the book regarding the future will be found embedded in its original meaning to the original recipients. Without understanding its original intent, confusion will arise concerning its futuristic application. It's clear

²³⁴ Bass, p.501

from a quick glance at these different systems of interpretation that the approach we take to Revelation will affect our understanding of it, and may even distract us from its chief value²³⁵.

1. Four Schools of Interpretation

(a) The Preterist

The preterist view believes that everything in the book has already been fulfilled²³⁶. The word comes from the Latin *praeteritus* (“to go by, pass”) which, in turn, is based upon *praeter* (“that which is beyond, past”)²³⁷. The Preterists see the message to the seven churches as having contemporary significance to the generation to which it was written. They understand that the prophecies in the book were determined for the near future, and were substantially fulfilled by the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and completely fulfilled by the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era²³⁸. Preterists believe that if Christ’s words in Matthew 24 are correct, then this position is inevitable²³⁹ and there is, therefore, no contemporary or future message for us in the book of Revelation. It simply encourages us by telling us what once happened and how it all led to a glorious period when the Roman Empire became Christian²⁴⁰.

(b) The Historical

²³⁵ Richards, pp.1077-78

²³⁶ Easley, p.4

²³⁷ Bass, pp.12-14

²³⁸ Walvoord, op.cit.

²³⁹ Bass, op.cit.

²⁴⁰ Walvoord, op.cit.

The historical view believes that the book covers predictions from John's day to the return of Christ²⁴¹, working itself out through the successive eras of history. The seven churches are portrayed as a period of time in church history. This group sees no significant message to the churches to which it was written. Inevitably, advocates of this position tend to see themselves as the last church and generation before Christ comes²⁴². According to this view everything happens in chronological and historical sequence²⁴³. However, a sub-division of the historical view argues that Revelation is an account of the principles which govern the life and the history of the Christian Church between the two advents. It is an unfolding of the history of the kingdom of God to its ultimate climax, not so much a description of particular things that have happened and will happen, and is a picture of the forces and the powers that are inimical to the best interests of the kingdom and are fighting against it²⁴⁴. Its principal problem is that seldom do two interpreters interpret a given passage as referring to the same event. Each interpreter tends to find its fulfillment in his generation²⁴⁵.

(c) The Futurist

The futurist view believes all predictions are all in the future²⁴⁶. This is the exact opposite to the preterist teaching, pointing not to the past, but to the future. Some of the church fathers certainly believed that the prophecy of the book of Revelation pointed to the future but not one imagined that two thousand years were to elapse before these things would take place²⁴⁷. Indeed, all these early Fathers taught that some of the things were already happening, and though others were still in the

²⁴¹ Easley, op.cit.

²⁴² Bass, op.cit.

²⁴³ Walvoord, op.cit.

²⁴⁴ Lloyd-Jones, pp. 144-50

²⁴⁵ Walvoord, op.cit.

²⁴⁶ Easley, op.cit.

²⁴⁷ Walvoord, op.cit.

future, that future was at hand and the end was coming very soon. They certainly had no conception of transferring this book far into the future²⁴⁸. The charge is often made that the Book of Revelation would not have been a comfort to early Christians or understood by them if it were largely futuristic. Adherents of the futuristic school of interpretation insist, on the contrary, that future events described in Revelation bring comfort and reassurance to Christians who in the nature of their faith regard their ultimate victory as future²⁴⁹.

(d) The Symbolic

The symbolic view believes the events described in Revelation are symbolic of the ongoing conflict between God and evil; neither historical nor future events are specifically portrayed²⁵⁰. The symbolic view is sometimes also called the spiritualist, idealist²⁵¹ or allegorical view²⁵². Those that advocate a symbolic approach to the book take Revelation to be a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in historical events throughout the age, rather than in one-time specific fulfillment. The symbols represent abstract ideas or general principles which may be seen at work in any age; if there is any reference to current history it is only because figures in current history (like Nero) are good examples of the general principle in question²⁵³. This group sees no significant message to the early churches to which this

²⁴⁸ Walvoord, Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Walvoord, Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Easley, op.cit.

²⁵¹ Bass, op.cit.

²⁵² Walvoord, op.cit.

²⁵³ Bass, op.cit.

book was written²⁵⁴. This view focuses on the ethical and spiritual truths of Revelation²⁵⁵.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The outlines given for the book of Revelation are almost as numerous as its different interpretations. This is not entirely strange as one's interpretational view greatly influences one's judgment on the outline of the book. Typical outlines would include what could be called the Detailed, Contextual, and Brief Outlines (attached as Addendum 1, 2 and 3).

Revelation is known to be a collection of seven letters and seven visions²⁵⁶ but the division of the visions differs greatly. Robert Utley's outline (attached as Addendum 4) which centered mostly on the seven literary divisions of the book, has largely been used. This can be considered as the thematic outline focusing on the seven main visions of Revelation. For the purpose of this study, the outline according to the seven visions John received have been divided as the basis for the counseling model.

Spence-Jones writes: "Most writers agree that the first three chapters are introductory"²⁵⁷, but I have not considered it as such. The revelation of Christ in chapter one and the subsequent pastoral letters (chapters 2-3) form the first vision of the book and the basis for Christ's message to the persecuted. I support Utley in classifying the first eight verses of chapter one as the introduction.

²⁵⁴ Bass, Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Fiensy, p.359

²⁵⁶ Achtemeier, p.700

²⁵⁷ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Revelation*, p.1

Those who view chapters 1-3 as introductory also see chapters 4-22:5 as the commencement of the “second great division”, where chapters 4 and 5 contain the first of the seven visions, “which is itself a prelude to the rest”²⁵⁸.

“The rest”, as Spence-Jones puts it, differ greatly from interpreter to interpreter. Kittel describes the fall of Babylon alone in seven visions depicted in chapters 17:1–19:10²⁵⁹.

Seven plays an important part in the structure of the book indeed. There are seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Some other examples of “seven” are²⁶⁰:

- (a) 7 lampstands, 1:12
- (b) 7 spirits of God, 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6
- (c) 7 stars, 1:16, 20; 2:1
- (d) 7 thunders, 10:3
- (e) 7 beatitudes, 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9
- (f) 7 kings, 17:10
- (g) 7 plagues, 15:6; 21:9
- (h) 7 connections to animals
 - (i) 7 horns...7 eyes, 5:6
 - (ii) 7 heads...7 diadems, 12:3; 13:1
 - (iii) woman on beast with 7 heads, 17:3, 7, 9
 - (iv) woman sitting on 7 mountains, 17:9

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BACKGROUND OF REVELATION

1. Authorship

Christopher Davis declares:

“We possess significant external evidence from the Early Christian Fathers that John the Apostle wrote Revelation. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Papias, and others, together suggest that, later in life, the Apostle moved from Palestine to Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. There he wrote the fourth Gospel and three New Testament

²⁵⁸ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Revelation*, p.143.

²⁵⁹ Kittel, p.89

²⁶⁰ Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, p.10

epistles (1-3 John). During the persecution carried out by Domitian, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he received the Revelation. After Domitian's death, during the reign of Nerva, John returned to Ephesus. He died during the reign of Trajan after living an unusually long life. The external evidence meshes well with internal evidence suggesting that the author was a Palestinian Jew, exiled to Patmos, writing to Christians in Asia during a time of severe persecution. That John the Apostle wrote Revelation has been the traditional view of the church for centuries²⁶¹.

If John was as young as fifteen when called to be Jesus' disciple in about AD 30, then the Apostle would have been eighty-three years old when Trajan's reign began in AD 98²⁶².

2. Date

The two dates singled out for the writing of the book are just before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and about AD 95 during the rule of Domitian. While some scholars prefer an earlier date (about AD 67) during the reign of Nero for the writing of Revelation, it seems the majority of scholars prefer a later date during the reign of Domitian, about AD 95–96, well after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70²⁶³.

3. Life and Times of the Original Recipients

Eusebius describes the persecution out against Christians by Domitian:

²⁶¹ Davis, pp.56-60

²⁶² Davis, p.56

²⁶³ Bass, pp.21-22

Many were victims of Domitian's appalling cruelty. At Rome great numbers of men distinguished by birth and attainments were executed without a fair trial, and countless other eminent men were for no reason at all banished from the country and their property confiscated. Finally, he showed himself the successor of Nero in enmity and hostility to God. He was, in fact, the second to organize persecution against us, though his father Vespasian had had no mischievous designs against us²⁶⁴.

According to Eusebius, Domitian carried out an organized persecution against Christians involving confiscation of property, banishment, and executions. He was the second Roman emperor to persecute Christians after Nero²⁶⁵.

(a) Emperor worship

The historian Pliny called Domitian the beast from hell who sat in its den, licking blood²⁶⁶. Domitian was the first emperor to have himself officially titled in Rome as "God the Lord." He insisted that other people hail his greatness with acclamations like "Lord of the earth," "Invincible," "Glory," "Holy," "Thou Alone,"²⁶⁷ or *Dominus et deus noster* ("Our Lord and God")²⁶⁸.

Roman emperor worship started in Ephesus in 48 BC when Julius Caesar was decreed "god on earth, descended from Ares and Aphrodite, and universal savior of human life." After his death the people of Rome echoed this declaration, and the Senate made it official in 42 BC, building an altar to him²⁶⁹. Octavian, Julius' son who became known as Augustus, was likewise worshipped. His birthday was celebrated as "the beginning of good news" for the world, and temples were dedicated to "Rome

²⁶⁴ Davis, op.cit.

²⁶⁵ Davis, Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Galli, op.cit.

²⁶⁷ Galli, Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Brown, op.cit.

²⁶⁹ Brand, p. 486

and Augustus”²⁷⁰. Then like his predecessor, at Augustus’s death in 14 BC he took his place in Rome among the gods.

The emperors Tiberius and Claudius likewise waited until their deaths for deification, but Caligula and Claudius’s successor Nero were not so patient. Caligula represented himself as Helios the sun god, and Nero claimed the designation Apollo. Domitian (AD 81–96) even issued his orders as coming from a god. He built a temple with a huge statue of himself in Ephesus²⁷¹.

Emperor worship entailed swearing allegiance to Rome by worshipping the emperor as god. This meant every member of the Roman Empire had to assemble once a year in designated areas in their cities and regions, stand before the city fathers in front of a statue of the Caesar and sprinkle a few sacrificial grains of incense into the eternal flame burning in front of the statue²⁷². They were then issued a certificate of compliance²⁷³.

It depended on the emperor whether that was enforced or not²⁷⁴ and in many cases also on the governor presiding over a specific area²⁷⁵. Domitian was fanatical about emperor worship. Determined to return his empire to its traditional Roman religion, Domitian was especially vicious toward Christians²⁷⁶.

Christians would not stand before a statue of an emperor and say “he is lord” as they believed and professed Jesus Christ to be Lord and Savior of mankind. This was reminiscent of the situation in Thessalonica in Acts 17:7 where the Christians were charged before the city elders as “acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus”. The issue for the believers at the time of

²⁷⁰ Brand, Ibid.

²⁷¹ Brand, Ibid.

²⁷² Brand, Ibid.

²⁷³ Richards, p.908.

²⁷⁴ Myers, p.334.

²⁷⁵ Wood, op.cit.

²⁷⁶ Brand, op.cit.

Domitian was an issue of Lordship – who is Lord? Caesar of Rome or Jesus called the Christ?

Pliny's letters to Trajan discuss imperial policy toward those who refuse to worship the emperor, less a religious than a political issue. This may be the background for the view of Roman hostility to Christians in Revelation 13-14, 17-18²⁷⁷.

It was at Domitian's behest that John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, a rocky island ten miles long and six miles wide, in the Aegean Sea. Rome had a penal camp there where the prisoners labored in the mines. It was here in this isolated spot that John received the visions that make up Revelation²⁷⁸.

(b) Trade guilds and mob action

Trade guilds (clubs made up of people who practiced the same vocation) held banquets honoring the emperor and their patron gods as silent guests²⁷⁹. Such practices were expressions of patriotism, national unity, and gratitude for the benevolent rule of the Roman emperor. They were the equivalent of saluting the flag or removing one's hat at the playing of the national anthem. However, refusal to participate called into question one's loyalty to the emperor, and this could lead to the most severe consequences²⁸⁰.

Many of the Christians who refused to bow to Caesar as god lost their jobs. Membership of a trade guild was one's commercial standing²⁸¹. Belonging to the trade guild often also entailed participating in the actions of worship²⁸² of that

²⁷⁷ Achtemeier, p.773

²⁷⁸ Wiersbe, p.790

²⁷⁹ Davis, p.66

²⁸⁰ Davis, Ibid.

²⁸¹ Wood, p.497

²⁸² Bass, p.107.

particular guild's patron gods²⁸³. Christians who refused to do so were not permitted membership of the guild. Not being part of the guild meant that you could not practice your trade, hence no income. Christians on the mainland of Asia at that time were often characteristically jobless²⁸⁴.

On the social standing and predicament of Christians during these times Davies wrote:

To avoid committing idolatry, Christians tended to withdraw from much of the social life of the city. Over time, they gained a reputation for being a rather strange and suspicious group, antisocial and lacking community spirit. Eventually the gossip mill started up, and vicious rumors spread:

“These Christians are so unpatriotic! They refuse to honor the emperor! And what do they do in those secret meetings of theirs? You don't suppose they are plotting some sort of rebellion, do you? Wasn't their own leader, Christos, crucified for claiming to be a king?”

“I heard that those ‘love feasts’ of theirs are incestuous orgies. They say Christos taught them to love their ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’!”

“It's even worse! I heard them talking about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the ‘Son.’ They are sacrificing babies and practicing cannibalism!”

“These ‘Christ people’ are impious atheists! They say idols are not real and refuse to worship any of our gods.”

As their neighbors turned against them, Christians became subject to social and economic discrimination, pressures and harassment, unofficial mob violence, and the plundering of their property²⁸⁵.

²⁸³ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.32

²⁸⁴ Wiersbe, 2 Co 8:1.

²⁸⁵ Davis, p.68

It seemed that not only were many Christians jobless, but they were also subject to being robbed and plundered and even cast from their homes. Many of them lost their lives because of their Christianity as they witnessed to the world that Jesus, not Caesar, is the King of kings²⁸⁶. Christians were portrayed and persecuted as “atheists” who were a danger to the state²⁸⁷.

(c) “Slaves out of love” and witnesses

John writes his letter by addressing it “to the bondservants” (τοῖς δοούλοις) which he later identified as the believers in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – all situated in modern-day Turkey

While slavery (δουλεία) implies forced obedience to the will of another²⁸⁸, the usage of the word slave (δούλος) in the New Testament came also to mean one who gives himself up willingly to the will of another, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:23; Romans 6:17, 20, and became the most common and general word for “servant,” as in Matthew 8:9, without any idea of bondage²⁸⁹. Paul uses this terminology to speak of Christ’s rescue of the Christian from a life of slavery to sin to become the possession of Christ and of righteousness²⁹⁰.

The passage in John 13 is particularly striking as Jesus presents himself as a servant (δούλος) when he washes his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper (John 13:1-20). He tells his disciples that he came ‘not to be served but to serve’ (Mark 10:45), and Matthew (12:18-21) quotes from the first servant song (Isa. 42:1-4) to describe Jesus.

²⁸⁶ Davis, p.122

²⁸⁷ De Villiers, [electronic ed.]

²⁸⁸ Kittel, p.274

²⁸⁹ Vine, pp.139-40

²⁹⁰ Myers, p.927

Likewise, Paul, quoting from an early Christian hymn, says that although Jesus was in the form of God, he ‘emptied himself, taking the form of a servant’ (Phil. 2:7)²⁹¹.

This set the tone for believers to call themselves “slaves of Jesus”, as servants are not greater than their master and if their Master served, so they too shall serve (John 13:16).

The word “Christian” (Χριστιανός) or “Christians” (Χριστιανοί) links directly to the idea of servanthood. The ancients used the *-iani* ending of words to denote the idea of “those belonging to” or “those siding with”. It may denote the soldiers of a particular general (*e.g. Galbiani*, Galba’s men), or the slaves of a particular individual *e.g. Caesariani*, Caesar’s slaves)²⁹². It is non-Christians who used the title—Agrippa, the accusers in 1 Peter, the ‘common people’ in Tacitus. The verb is frequently translated ‘were publicly called’ (*cf. Rom. 7:3*), referring to official action in registering the new sect under the name ‘Christians’. But the verb could be used more loosely, and perhaps Luke means no more than that the name came into popular use in the first city where a distinctive name became necessary. From this it might easily pass into official and universal use at an early stage²⁹³.

Believers were referring to themselves as “slaves of Christ Jesus” (δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). It seemed the derivative to *Christianoi* was a natural development.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, nothing describes the reality of persecution of the Christian faith more than the Greek word for being a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, namely μαρτυρέω (*martureō*). It simply means to bear witness, testify, testimony, or having a good reputation²⁹⁴, but the word became popular for an entirely different reason. To be a witness means to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel of

²⁹¹ Achtemeier, pp. 929-30

²⁹² Wood, p.184

²⁹³ Wood, *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ Thomas, *op.cit.*

Jesus, but in testifying to the truthfulness of the gospel, disciples often encounter fierce resistance from demonic forces trying to halt that testimony. The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16), but the gospel-carriers often paid with their lives.

To be a witness of Jesus Christ often meant to become a martyr for Christ. Like Jesus his followers proved to be faithful witnesses even to the point of death (1Timothy 6:13)²⁹⁵. As the early witnesses sealed with their own blood their testimony to the faith, the first meaning was readily merged into the second²⁹⁶. Witnessing and suffering as a result became synonymous.

CONCLUSION

One has to agree with Dunnett when he writes: None of these approaches to the interpretation of this prophecy [symbolic, futurist, historical, and preterist] is singularly satisfactory²⁹⁷. Certainly the book had a special value to those enduring Roman persecution, but its value did not cease with the close of the Apostolic Age²⁹⁸. Of what value would Revelation be to the believers in John's day if all it did was foretell world history? And of what value would it be to us today? ²⁹⁹ While we recognize that Revelation does contain many basic spiritual principles in symbolic form, we must also admit that the book deals with real events that will one day take place in the world³⁰⁰.

However, the starting point will be the basic principle for sound exegesis and eventually sound hermeneutics. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart described this as

²⁹⁵ Kittel, p.568.

²⁹⁶ Lee Tan, [electronic ed.]

²⁹⁷ Dunnett, pp. 98–100

²⁹⁸ Wiersbe, pp.792-93

²⁹⁹ Wiersbe, Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Wiersbe, Ibid.

the “then and there/here and now” principle. The “then and there” must be understood before the “here and now” because the first step in exegesis is to uncover the original author’s intent. God’s Word to us was first of all His Word to them. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in language they could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time, and sometimes in thought. This is the major reason one needs to learn to interpret the Bible³⁰¹. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers³⁰².

As Wiersbe concluded, the value of the Book of Revelation did not cease with the close of the Apostolic Age, but “had a special value to those enduring Roman persecution”. This is exactly where we will start.

The recipients of the book of Revelation were real people, being real believers of a real Jesus Christ, in a real world with real persecution and real death. They needed real encouragement and real comfort. In the pages of this Revelation was just such a real message.

To apply the basic principles of healthy exegesis and hermeneutics we need to take these people and their circumstances into account to ascertain Christ’s message to *them*. Once we do this, we will be able to understand and appreciate Christ’s message to *our* severely persecuted Christians today.

If, however, we fail to take the original message to the original recipients into account, we stand on the verge of distorting the integrity of the book as containing a real message of comfort to the real people of AD 95. If we view the book of Revelation as primarily a prediction of future events, we fail to take the original message into account. There would have been no comfort or encouragement to the

³⁰¹ Fee, p. 23

³⁰² Fee, p. 74

severely persecuted believers of AD 95 in learning that the message was actually not for them but for the body of believers 2000 years later. Did Jesus intend the letter to be read, understood, and appreciated by the people of AD 95? If yes, and one simply cannot deny His intention, we should attempt to uncover the message that brought so much relief and comfort in a very dark, demonic time in the life of the first century believers.

Chapter Six

VI. THE REVELATION OF CHRIST TO THE BELIEVERS OF 95 AD

The message of Revelation uniquely relates to all churches and believers who are experiencing persecution from a fallen world system³⁰³. The writer's main concern is to give his readers hope and encouragement, and to urge them to remain faithful during times of suffering and persecution³⁰⁴. However, the question is how such a feat is possible?

THE SETTING

Apart from the fact that the book was written amidst severe persecution – John being exiled to Patmos and Christian believers being punished for their faith on the mainland – the special content was delivered under special circumstances.

The effect the message had on its readers also deserves special mention.

1. Special Content

(a) “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (v.1)

The very first words of the book reveal the nucleus of the message. God is “revealing, uncovering, disclosing, taking out of hiding, or making fully known³⁰⁵” His Son Jesus Christ.

This is a highly appropriate introduction for the message to follow, as Jesus Christ is the essence of everything God has to say. Jesus Christ *is* God's message!

³⁰³ Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, p.12

³⁰⁴ Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, p.14

³⁰⁵ Louw, p.338

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Not only is the Son the visible expression of the invisible Father, but the Son is also the “Alpha and Omega” of everything.

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Colossians 1:16-18).

(b) “To show His servants” (v.1)

The message is audience-specific. The Father’s revelation of His Son is directed specifically to the believers. The Body of Christ is receiving a special divine disclosure of the Head of the Body – Jesus Christ. As Satan focuses his attention on the believers in a special way, so does the Father.

One might ask why it was necessary for God to unmask (or unveil) Jesus to His followers. These people were not merely religious or merely “God fearers” as Cornelius was in Acts 10:2. They were regenerated, spirit-filled children of the Most High God. Was Jesus not clear to them? Did they not know Him? Were they not familiar with His voice? Why “unmask” Him as if He was concealed to them?

The answer might include the following reasons:

- (i) They are still being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians

3:18). This transformation is an ongoing process and happens by the *beholding* with unveiled face, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. The Church progresses to maturity by partaking from the Son. The constant revelation of the person, character and ministry of Jesus is the lifeblood of the Church.

- (ii) Their experiences of persecution and calamity might have clouded their vision of Jesus, seriously threatening to discourage, scatter or destroy them. Once the Church loses sight of its Principle it rapidly starts to die.
- (iii) God wants to answer their prayers by providing divine answers for the situation they are in.

(c) “Things which must shortly take place” (v.1)

This specific revelation of Jesus Christ is partly qualified by the above phrase.

The revelation of Jesus wasn't just a mere rekindling of old truths or the mere informing of the believers about their heritage and hope in Christ. It was more than that. It was the practical revelation of Christ amidst the Church that is amidst the world. Christ is not absent and uninvolved. He is participating and present and His rule is actively determining the course of events.

The readers of Revelation were about to hear what the Judge of all judges was going to do to clamp down on unrighteousness and uphold the righteous. The revelation of Jesus Christ is not only a revelation of who Jesus is, but also of what He does. It is as much an unveiling of His actions as it is of His person.

(d) “Which God gave Him” (v.1)

The Father is the ultimate revealer (Matthew 11:25 ἀπεκάλυψας). The Son is the medium through whom the revelation passes to men. That the Son receives what He is and has from the Father, is the constant teaching of the Gospel of John³⁰⁶.

2. Special Circumstances

(a) “In the tribulation” (v.9)

Both John and the original recipients of the book of Revelation were victims of persecution. That was their reality. It was not of their own doing or because of choice, but because of their faith in their Lord Jesus Christ. Their circumstances were not romantic or heroic. They were suffering greatly and had prayed continuously to God for deliverance and justice (Revelation 6:10). Their circumstances didn’t change, but they met Jesus in the midst of it. They encountered the One who said “I will never leave you nor forsake you” so that they might boldly say “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

(b) “In the Spirit” (v.10)

The πνεῦμα is the power which gives visions the ordinary man cannot have. The πνεῦμα can lead a man off into wonderful regions which the natural man does not perceive³⁰⁷. γενέσθαι ἐν πνεύμα denotes the exaltation of the prophet under inspiration (for example Ezekiel 3:12, 3:14, 37:1)³⁰⁸.

Bass contrasts the phrase “in the spirit” with “in the body” to denote a vision/trance experience as opposed to a bodily experience³⁰⁹, while Swete also points

³⁰⁶ Swete, pp.1-2

³⁰⁷ Kittel, p.449

³⁰⁸ Swete, pp.12-13

³⁰⁹ Bass, p.87

out the difference between “in the Spirit” and “in the flesh (εἶναι ἐν σαρκί, Rom. 8:9)³¹⁰.

We must note that this revelation was mediated by God’s Holy Spirit. John did not simply have unusual insight into what was about to happen³¹¹, but he was ministered to in a supernatural way by God’s Spirit.

3. Special Effect

The special effect of the message is seen in two distinct features of chapter 1 namely the blessing and the doxology. The blessing is pronounced on those who hear, understand, and keep the words written in this revelation (v.3), while the doxology in vv.4-8 expresses the effect the revelation has on those who hear and understand it. It makes sense that John first received the visions (which he recorded as he received them) and then sat down to rerecord them in the form that we more or less have today. This means that the doxology is in actual fact a song of praise that is the result of everything he has already seen and witnessed but we still have to read.

(a) The blessing

(i) “Blessed is he who reads... hears... and keeps” (v.3)

The first feature is the pronounced blessing in verse 3: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it...” Revelation as seen from the perspective of revealing Jesus to the Church—using signs and symbols to represent His glory and authority—is very personable and is certainly a blessing³¹². This is the only book in the Bible in which a

³¹⁰ Swete, p.12

³¹¹ Bass, op.cit.

³¹² Fogle, p.10

special blessing is promised to those who read and take heed of its message³¹³. This is the first of seven blessings in this book (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). The fact that those who read it were blessed shows not only its inspired nature but also its relevance to the people of that day and every day³¹⁴.

The Greek word μακάριος is translated as “being especially favored” (blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged) – being the privileged recipient of divine favor³¹⁵. This special favor and happiness is also extended to the hearers if they keep what they have heard. Perhaps the best equivalent in English is “How fortunate is the person who!...”³¹⁶. Swete finds in this passage a “scarcely doubtful reference to our Lord’s saying in Luke 11:28 μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες, though the Johannine τηρεῖν (John 8:51 f., 14:23, 15:20, 17:6, 1 John 2:5, etc.) takes the place of φυλάσσειν”³¹⁷.

John’s witness to the heavenly commentary concerning what God has done in Christ is not intended as an apocalyptic curiosity to tantalize the intellect but to inform Christians about how God wants them to live in the light of recent redemptive history³¹⁸. It is commonly known that the emphasis on hearing means hearing for the sake of doing. As Bass quotes Chilton: “No Biblical writer ever revealed the future merely for the sake of satisfying curiosity: The goal was always to direct God’s people toward right action in the present”³¹⁹. Revelation was always intended to be a blessing for the servants of God—the Church. It could never be a blessing to an unbeliever. Why is that so? The condition indicated in v.3 had to be met if the

³¹³ Bass, p.63

³¹⁴ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.19

³¹⁵ Arndt, p.611

³¹⁶ Bratcher, p.16

³¹⁷ Swete, p.3

³¹⁸ Beale, p.184

³¹⁹ Bass, op.cit.

prophecy was going to be a blessing. It would not be a blessing just to read it or hear it³²⁰. The verb τηρέω means to retain in custody or to persist in obedience³²¹.

An alternative translation model, as suggested by Bratcher would be:

Happy is the person who reads to the congregation this message (that came) from God, and happy are those who listen to it and obey what it says. For the time when God will make all these things happen is very near.³²²

(ii) “...For the time is near” (v.3)

ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς is the motive for hearing and keeping: the season for the fulfillment of the vision is at hand; the hopes and fears which it arouses belong to the near future³²³. But the precise meaning of the clause must be determined so that we can understand how it serves as a basis for the preceding statement. It is linked with ἐν τάχει (“quickly”) in v.1 as another temporal expression of imminence. The connection between the two expressions of imminence is highlighted in the conclusion of John’s book, where a paraphrase of 1:3a (22:7b: “blessed is the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this book”) is introduced by a repetition of 1:1a (22:6–7a: “to show his servants what must come to pass quickly. And, behold, I come quickly”) and where ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστίν (“for the time is near”) and τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου (“the words of the prophecy of this book”) are repeated (22:10)³²⁴.

The statement has a striking figurative parallel in Mark 1:15: πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (“the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near”). It is apparent from the synonymous parallelism in Mark 1:15

³²⁰ Fogle, p.10

³²¹ Arndt, p.1002

³²² Bratcher, p.17

³²³ Swete, pp.3-4

³²⁴ Beale, pp.185-86

that the nearness of “the kingdom” prophesied in the Old Testament is but a sharpening of what is stated in the first clause about the fulfillment of “the time” in the present. The same present aspect appears relevant for Revelation 1:3b. The least that can be said is that the wording in Revelation refers to the immediate future. John probably views the death and resurrection of Christ as inaugurating the long-awaited kingdom of the end times, which the Old Testament (e.g., Daniel) had predicted and which will continue to exist throughout the church age. Therefore, the ethical assertion of v.3a is based on the “already-and-not-yet” end-time aspect of v.3b (cf. the almost identical wording and logical connection in 22:7; see also 3:10–12; 22:12). The readers should obey the ethical injunctions of John’s prophetic words because of what their Lord has done for them and what he will do in the future (vv. 6–7 juxtapose these two latter-day time elements). To claim to have benefited from Christ’s past redemptive work entails an acknowledgment to submit to him as Lord in the present and in the future³²⁵.

(b) The doxology (vv.4-8)

The doxology in this passage is significant as it follows the revelation of Jesus Christ. It highlights the effect of the message – which John has already received, but which he now rerecords for our benefit – which brings the reader to a place where he can truly and honestly say, without reservation (Habakkuk 3:17-19):

Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

³²⁵ Beale, *Ibid.*

John's praise is noteworthy as it sums up the essence of the message of Revelation (vv.4-8).

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"

The ultimate message is that, regardless of what happens, Jesus Christ is on the throne and He rules for eternity. This is what the recipients of the letter needed to see in 95 AD and this is what our fellow believers who are being severely persecuted need to see today.

PART 1 - THE FIRST VISION (1:9–3:22)

It is clear from the start that this book is a book of symbolism. The correct interpretation of the symbols reveals the true meaning of the text and opens the path to a formula for a counseling "methodology". What John has seen is beyond the description of normal speech, so he has to use similes. This further supports the contention that Revelation contains symbolic material that cannot be described directly but only by simile and analogy³²⁶.

³²⁶ Yeatts, p.41

The meaning and harmony of the first vision form the basis of everything that is to come. It is the essence of John's doxology and the absolute victory during persecution.

The whole key to seeing Jesus and hearing what He has to say comes down to this: do we have the eyes to see or the ears to hear? Jesus said to the perplexed multitude that had experienced the miracle of the bread and fishes, "Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (Mark 8:18). The same kind of challenge is issued in Revelation, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9). As Fogle puts it: "We must not only have our spiritual eyes open to Jesus but our ears open as well, perceiving spiritual truths as He trumpets it for all the world to hear. These spiritual senses are only activated if we truly seek after God. He will then reveal Jesus to us by sight and sound"³²⁷.

The general character of the vision is one of the glory of Christ, the shining face being reminiscent of that which John had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration decades earlier (Matt. 17:2)³²⁸.

4. Interpretation of the symbolism

(a) "A loud voice, as of a trumpet" (v.10)

Notice that the first event in the vision did not consist of anything that John saw, but rather of what John heard. Fogle interprets the voice of Christ in chapter 1 as "the voice of Jesus proclaiming the love and judgment of God to all who will listen"³²⁹.

³²⁷ Fogle, p.36

³²⁸ Bass, pp.90-92

³²⁹ Fogle, p.34

Although the voice comes with startling suddenness as from one who, approaching from behind, is unobserved until he speaks³³⁰, the meaning of the trumpet metaphor is much more significant than just indicating surprise or clarity of sound. This is very characteristic of God's communication with man³³¹ as well as God's revelations of Himself³³².

Beale suggests that the language used is that of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit, thus giving John's revelation prophetic authority like that of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5). This identification with prophetic authority is enforced by the description of the voice that John hears as "a great voice as a trumpet," evoking the voice that Moses heard when God revealed himself on Mount Sinai³³³. This phrase was used in the context of God giving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:16)³³⁴. Therefore, at this early point in the book there is already a hint that one of its major concerns will be judgment (judgment, as we shall see, of the world and of those in the church who compromise with the world)³³⁵.

The trumpet reminds us of the two edged sword that cuts both ways (Hebrews 4:12-13). It prunes the church and judges the world. The trumpet that called Israel to heed the words of their God is also the trumpet that sounds God's war on those who rebel against him.

(b) "Seven golden lampstands" (v.12)

³³⁰ Swete, p.13

³³¹ Bass, p.88

³³² Jamieson, op.cit.

³³³ Beale, p.203

³³⁴ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.24

³³⁵ Beale, pp.203-04

Commentators are not unanimous about the type of lampstands John saw. One opinion is that John saw the heavenly version of the temple's seven-branched candelabrum while others hold that it is no representation of the temple *menorah* at all.

Bass³³⁶, Fogle³³⁷ and Beagle³³⁸ find the symbolism in the temple *menorah* and that of Zechariah 4. Utley³³⁹ and Ironside³⁴⁰, disagrees. The symbolism of the lampstands coincides more with that of the temple and Zachariah 4, for three reasons³⁴¹:

- (i) the mention of “seven spirits” in Rev. 1:4 (cf. Zechariah 4:6);
- (ii) the interpretation of the lampstand vision of in v.20, which follows the same vision-interpretation pattern as Zechariah 4:2, 10;
- (iii) and the clear allusion to Zechariah 4:2, 10 in Revelation 4:5 and 5:6 in close association with allusions to Daniel.

Nevertheless, the reasons for the different opinions are not important. What is important is the meaning of the seven golden lampstands with which all authors unequivocally agree. The lampstands, as explained in v.20, represent God's Church manifested in different congregations. They are the seven churches situated in the Roman proconsular province of Asia.

The candlestick stood in the holy place, the type of the Church on earth, in the same way that the holiest place was the type of Church in heaven. The holy place's

³³⁶ Bass, op.cit.

³³⁷ Fogle, pp.36-37

³³⁸ Beale, p.206

³³⁹ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.25

³⁴⁰ Ironside, pp.23-25

³⁴¹ Beale, op.cit.

only light was derived from the candlestick, daylight being excluded; so the Lord God is the Church's only light; hers is the light of grace, not nature. "Golden" symbolizes at once the greatest preciousness and sacredness; so that in the *Zend Avesta*, "golden" is synonymous with heavenly or divine³⁴².

The candlesticks also represent God's Church as God's property. Zechariah 4:7 foresees that the successful building of the temple in the midst of the world's opposition will be achieved ultimately by "the Anointed One," who "will rule over all kingdoms",³⁴³.

Finally, it represents the divine testimony of Christ in the midst of the Church in the midst of the world. Christ's Church brings moral light to a wicked world (Matthew 5:14)³⁴⁴. Fogle explains: "...the 'lampstand' (the Church) is given power by the seven lamps on it, a power primarily to witness as a light uncompromisingly to the world so that the gates of hell (cf. 2:9–11, 13) will not prevail against the building of God's temple, the true Israel, which is identified with the heavenly temple (see on 1:16)"³⁴⁵.

(c) "The Son of Man" (v.13)

John's vision of Jesus is similar to, but clearly outstrips Daniel's vision of a revealing angel (Dan. 10:5–6).

This vision was of special significance and comfort to those churches in the scenes of blood through which they were called to pass. In the burning fiery furnace

³⁴² Jamieson, op.cit.

³⁴³ Beale, p.207

³⁴⁴ Easley, p.18

³⁴⁵ Fogle, op.cit.

into which they were soon to be thrown, there was One who would walk with them, whose appearance was like to the Son of Man³⁴⁶.

The lampstand in the tabernacle and the temple was in the presence of God, and the light that emanated from it apparently represented God's presence (see Numbers 8:1–4; in Exodus 25:30–31 the lampstand is mentioned directly after the “bread of Presence”; likewise 40:4; 1 Kings 7:48–49). This emphatic notion of the lampstand denoting God's presence with the church is confirmed in Rev. 11:4, where the “lampstands ... stand before the Lord of the earth”³⁴⁷. In this passage Christ stands in the midst of His Church.

The Lord Jesus Christ has promised to be with His churches always to the end of the world, filling them with light, and life, and love, for He is the very animating, informing soul of the church³⁴⁸. Unless Christ is in the midst, the church is dead and shorn of power³⁴⁹.

Jesus stands in the middle of The Church yesterday, today and forever. He loves it and is close to it. He speaks to it with His voice³⁵⁰. Jesus is first presented in Revelation not enthroned in heaven or fighting evil but present with and caring for his people. Suffering Christians throughout the ages have taken comfort in Jesus' presence with them. He is not an absentee Lord. He is an abiding presence and personality³⁵¹. The continual burning of the lamps on the seven lampstands will mean that the presence of Christ (the divine Ancient of Days [v.14]) will be continually with the churches and protecting them spiritually³⁵².

³⁴⁶ Bass, pp.90-92

³⁴⁷ Fogle, op.cit.

³⁴⁸ Henry, [electronic ed.]

³⁴⁹ Bass, op.cit.

³⁵⁰ Fogle, op.cit.

³⁵¹ Bass, op.cit.

³⁵² Beale, op.cit.

Jesus is someone “like a son of man.” It identifies Jesus as maintaining His essential humanity even in His exalted state. The same Jesus that once lived and walked in Galilee is now described as glorious and powerful beyond imagination³⁵³. Swete is reluctant to take this passage as an equivalent of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, which, as he points out, appears only in Acts 7:56 outside the Gospels. However, he still agrees that the glorified Christ is human, but transfigured³⁵⁴.

(d) “Garment and golden band” (v.13)

The symbolism of the flowing robe, the golden belt worn across the chest, snow white hair, fiery eyes, and brazen feet come together to transmit one central theme and message. The secondary interpretations will be looked at first.

According to the various expositors, the golden band worn across the chest is an emblem of high rank in the ancient world, and the long, linen garment is probably priestly. White hair is the emblem of age and honor-and possibly wisdom. The flaming eyes convey the idea of piercing vision, and the feet like fine brass suggest the irresistibility of His judgement, as He will later tread the “great winepress of the wrath of God” (Rev. 14:19). The two-edged sword from His mouth can hardly refer to anything other than His word (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17)³⁵⁵. Although none of these could in the least be considered wrong, they loosely represent secondary meanings and miss the primary message.

Swete carefully searches the Hebrew and Greek texts together with the ancient writings of the church fathers to conclude “...perhaps the reference is rather to the Prophets”³⁵⁶. He veers more towards an interpretation of a garment likened to a

³⁵³ Easley, op.cit.

³⁵⁴ Swete, p.15

³⁵⁵ Bass, op.cit.

³⁵⁶ Swete, pp.15-16

prophet than that of high priest, based on technical information regarding the thread of the high priestly garment.

Beale argues that although the clothing of v.13 could also resemble kingly attire, its use here evokes the image of a priest because of the clear temple atmosphere of the “lampstands” and the angels coming out of the heavenly temple, who wear the same clothing in 15:5–8³⁵⁷.

Fogle makes an interesting observation. He says that Jesus’ dress possibly reveals His functions as a priest and as a judge. That kind of dress would be appropriate in either capacity³⁵⁸. Although we cannot deny Jesus’ priestly role as High Priest ministering to the Church, the connotation as judge is of particular importance as it applies strongly to the other aspects described in this first vision. According to Fogle the golden girdle about His breast, or chest area, is significant of the fact that He was “tried by fire,” purified like gold through obedience unto death, whereby He alone can be granted the authority as High Priest and Judge³⁵⁹.

Without saying what the garment signifies, Bratcher at least agrees that this vestment indicates dignity and rank³⁶⁰.

Wiersbe agrees partly with Fogle as he describes the robe to be that of a Judge-King, One with honor and authority³⁶¹.

Although Yeatts interprets the meaning of the robe to denote Jesus’ priestly office, he views the golden sash across His chest probably alluding to the golden belt worn by ancient royalty. Workmen tucked their robes around their belts to labor more easily, but Christ has finished his work and can allow his robe to flow freely without

³⁵⁷ Beale, p.209

³⁵⁸ Fogle, p.37

³⁵⁹ Fogle, Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Bratcher, p.30

³⁶¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

its being an encumbrance. This symbol attributes to Christ the dignity of a king. Later He will be given the title “King of Kings” (19:16)³⁶².

Ironside translates the golden girdle to mean service and it almost appears as if his interpretation is in contrast to that of Yeatts. “We read of the servant girding himself and waiting upon the table. Here it is a high-priestly service. Our blessed Lord is now serving us at God’s right hand”³⁶³.

In the light of that which follows it will become clear that the primary message of the first vision is that of Jesus in the midst of the Church in the midst of the world – the ultimate and perfect judge who not only judges the world, but also prunes the Church. The strong image of an active Christ amidst everything the Church experiences is a powerful message of encouragement to the believers regardless of what they have to go through.

The long flowing robe and golden sash across the chest are not unlike that of a judge in the ancient world. Jesus is the final authority among men. He is the one who is man’s final and ultimate judge.

(e) “White hair and flaming eyes” (v.14)

The image of Christ with white hair like white wool or white snow contains strong symbolism which adds to the previous images we have already seen. Again various interpretations are given which are not in essence unlike the character and qualities of Christ, but we are looking for the one most persistent in the Revelation to appreciate the heart of the message.

Swete ascribes the white hair as depicting the Ancient of Days mentioned in Daniel 7:9-10. The imagery in that passage has a striking resemblance to the one in

³⁶² Yeatts, p.42

³⁶³ Ironside, p.25

Revelation. Expositors find in the hair white as snow, a symbol of the eternal preexistence of the Son and this view seems to be justified by Daniel³⁶⁴.

Swete makes an important comment regarding symbols and symbolism that is especially of value when interpreting Revelation. Regarding the Ancient of Days he remarks: “Yet the figure cannot be pressed; white hair suggests decay, whereas Jesus Christ is unchangeable”³⁶⁵. Symbols and symbolism are limited in scope and should not be extended beyond their reach.

Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days is a judicial figure and the transferal of these attributes to Christ also evokes His role as the latter-day, divine judge, which is also clear from Revelation 19:12 where οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός is a metaphor of judgment. Jesus’ constant presence with the churches means that he always knows their spiritual condition, which results either in blessing or judgment (e.g., Revelation 2:18 and its development in 2:23). This role of judgment is enforced by Daniel 10, since there the primary purpose of the heavenly man is to reveal the divine decree that Israel’s persecutors would assuredly be judged (see 10:21–12:13)³⁶⁶. To this Swete adds: “The penetrating glance which flashed with quick intelligence, and when need arose with righteous wrath, was noticed by those who were with our Lord in the days of His Flesh and finds its counterpart, as the Seer now learns, in the Risen and Ascended Life”³⁶⁷.

Fogle sees the white hair as suggestive of intense purity, without spot or blemish³⁶⁸ while Easley sees it as a symbol of “respect due to the aged for the wisdom of their advanced years (Prov. 16:31). This part of the picture points to Jesus’

³⁶⁴ Swete, p.16

³⁶⁵ Swete, Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Beale, op.cit.

³⁶⁷ Swete, op.cit.

³⁶⁸ Fogle, op.cit.

wisdom... He knows what is best for his people, even when they are suffering”³⁶⁹. Yeatts confirms Easley’s interpretation by adding “Among the Hebrews—and, indeed, among many cultures—the white-haired, elderly person was honored as one having ‘respect, honor, wisdom, and high social status’ gained from experience... Therefore, the symbol most likely denotes wisdom”³⁷⁰. Jamieson stresses that the color of the hair should not be seen as depicting age, but rather purity and glory as white hair derived from age is a sign of decay³⁷¹. Sloan sees both the symbolism of the hair and fiery gaze as “powerful to judge and discern, were like a flame of fire”³⁷².

Here we have a vision of the Judge of judges. Whereas earthly judges have limited insight and wisdom, Jesus possesses pure and complete wisdom and insight to judge every man and all the nations. Where even today judges in the British judicial system wear white wigs to portray wisdom and aptitude to rule over disputes, the Heavenly Judge is the ultimate wisdom of God in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (1Corinthians 1:30, Colossians 2:3). He is the judge of all men, who judges and orders the affairs of men in absolute wisdom, which is achieving the most perfect end in the most perfect way the glory of God. He is the only Judge that has perfect insight into the heart of man, giving righteous judgment in all things. The writer of Hebrews describes the gaze of Christ as “...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

(f) “feet like brass and voice as many waters” (v.15)

³⁶⁹ Easley, p.19

³⁷⁰ Yeatts, op.cit.

³⁷¹ Jamieson, op.cit.

³⁷² Sloan, p.665

In the symbolism of the feet like brass and voice as many waters we confirm the same message as in the flowing robe, golden sash, hair like white snow, and fiery eyes. Bass finds a reminder in this passage of Isaiah 52:7 where Isaiah exclaims: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good *things*, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”. Yet feet that are so lovely to some bearing the gospel message, are so terrifying to others trampling the grapes of the wrath of God. Here the feet burn with the fire of a furnace, encouraging to the Church and its martyrs, but terrifying to the enemies of Christ³⁷³. Likewise Christ voice speaks of majesty as well as fierceness.

Scripturally, brass speaks of strength and judgment, particularly when described as burned in a furnace (refined). These brass feet of Jesus represent a strong-standing Jesus bringing forth judgment³⁷⁴. The brazen altar which stood before the tabernacle was that on which the fire of God’s judgment was burning continually. It was of brass, because brass could withstand the fire. Throughout Scripture it is a symbol of judgment. Christ’s ways are in righteousness unyielding. The day is coming when He shall put His feet on everything contrary to truth and righteousness. Everything unholy will be stamped out in divine judgment³⁷⁵, subduing his enemies, treading them to powder³⁷⁶. The Lord had come to judge the churches, and He would also judge the evil world system³⁷⁷.

Henry reflects: “The ‘sound of many waters’ makes me think of Niagara Falls! Perhaps two ideas are suggested here: (1) Christ gathers together all the ‘streams of revelation’ and is the Father’s ‘last Word’ to man (Heb. 1:1–3); (2) He speaks with

³⁷³ Bass, p.93

³⁷⁴ Fogle, p.38

³⁷⁵ Ironside, pp.29-30

³⁷⁶ Henry, op.cit.

³⁷⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

power and authority and must be heard”³⁷⁸. Yeatts cites: “All else is drowned out and his judgment alone prevails”³⁷⁹.

His judgment scatters His enemies; they melt like wax (Psalm 97:5), they disperse like the wind nothing can stop the onward march of the Church of Jesus Christ. His feet are like brass. In that majestic, beautiful awesome wondrous voice, the words defeat every enemy and at the same time cut away all the excess growth, all the undergrowth that is hurting His Church.

(g) “Two-edged sword and face like the sun” (v.16)

“He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11:4).

The “sharp two-edged sword” proceeding from Jesus’ mouth is based on the prophecies of Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2, which add further to his depiction as an eschatological judge and as the one beginning to fulfill this messianic expectation³⁸⁰. Hebrews 4:12 confirms this by saying:

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The element of the vision that John noted last, perhaps because it was the most important, was Jesus’ face. Here John can only mean the glory of full deity. In Matthew 17:2, Jesus’ face “shone like the sun” at his Transfiguration. The Jesus that

³⁷⁸ Henry, op.cit.

³⁷⁹ Yeatts, op.cit.

³⁸⁰ Beale, pp.211-12

John saw both on the Mount of Transfiguration and on the island of Patmos, is none other than Almighty God³⁸¹.

God promises in Malachi 2:3-4:

But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*,” says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 4:2-3).

This vision of Christ was totally different in appearance from the Savior that John knew “in the flesh” when He was ministering on earth. He was not the “gentle Jewish carpenter” that sentimentalists like to sing about. He is the risen, glorified, exalted Son of God, the Priest-King who has the authority to judge all men, beginning with His own people (1 Peter 4:17)³⁸².

5. Meaning of the vision

In the midst of the fierce trials and persecution the believers were facing in the first century AD – and with the trials and persecutions still to come – Jesus reveals Himself to John as the Ultimate Judge and Lord of everyone and everything.

The message in Philippians 2 is of particular importance here as it is the key to the Christian understanding of Jesus. Jesus is no longer just “Jesus of Nazareth” but He is the “Lord Jesus Christ” – a Name above every name. At this Name every single person shall bow and confess that He is Lord.

Of course, as we have discussed in previous chapters, once a person is a light in the darkness, darkness will hate him. For people who dwell in darkness there is only one answer: turn the lights out. There rises from within the darkness a hatred of

³⁸¹ Easley, p.20

³⁸² Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

the Church. The fact that believers are united to Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, makes them shine as well and therefore the world's hatred of Christ is taken out on them. That is why Jesus said His disciples are going to be persecuted for His sake. They will be thrown out of the synagogue and be put to death for His sake.

Jesus' message to His church in the first chapter of Revelation could very well be summed up as saying: "You have been beaten up, losing your jobs, thrown out of your homes and living in caves, dying for the sake of the Gospel, and banished to islands. You are hurt, you are beaten you are persecuted. Of course, you are lampstands in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't like you. Understand the honor; understand the dignity that is yours, for they would never touch you were you not mystically united to the central stem of the candlestick that is none other than the Sun shining in all His righteousness".

PART 2 - THE SECOND VISION i (4:1-5:14)

The second vision in Revelation spans little more than four chapters. It is necessary to divide it into two parts. Part (i) deals with chapters 4-5, while part (ii) deals with chapters 6-7:17.

When reading Revelation, various Scriptures and incidents in Scripture come to mind that act as clues for interpretation of the message. This was true of the first vision and it is also especially true of the second.

The words "After these things" (μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον) in 4:1 is a formula, which occurs again 7:1, 9, 15:5, 18:1, serving to introduce a new vision of special importance. Here μετὰ τοῦτα refers to the vision of 1:12 ff. which, with the messages to the Churches arising out of it, has occupied the first three chapters. The vision of the glorified Christ walking among the Churches on earth is followed by a vision of

the Court of Heaven³⁸³. The visions in revelation are by no means chronological, but rather deal with the rule of Christ from different perspectives.

What John saw was nothing less than what Moses saw and heard in Exodus 19³⁸⁴, except John saw and heard the total fulfillment. Moses was called up Mount Sinai into God's presence to get a glimpse of the Tabernacle of God. John was called into heaven to see the fulfillment of God's vision to Moses. There is a trumpet voice that calls him through the door into the invisible half of the universe to see the way the universe really is. What is happening around us, all that happens around us are only effects. The cause of those effects is in the invisible half of the universe, and John was called out of the physical half of the universe to see the world of causes. In the invisible half of the universe he must now see what causes the world history to be what it is. What is the cause of what is going on?³⁸⁵

It is crucial to note at this stage that the second vision has to do with the whole redemptive work of Christ beginning with the condition before the death and resurrection of Christ, extending till after the glorious crowning of Jesus as Lord and King and the ensuing effects.

John's second vision is in actual fact a cosmic Holy of Holies. The conception of the opened heavens occurs first in Ezekiel 1. In this vision a door only is opened, and not heaven as a whole, i.e. the vision is limited to the Seer; only one who has been lifted up into the heavenly places can see what is passing within. The perfect participle ἡνεωγμένη implies that the door stood open, ready for the Seer's coming³⁸⁶.

³⁸³ Swete, p.65

³⁸⁴ Swete, Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, [Online Available]

³⁸⁶ Swete, op.cit.

The first voice (4:1) that John had heard was introduced to us in 1:10 and proved by description to be Jesus Christ. The Greek has the masculine participle, which does not agree either with voice or with trumpet, both of which are feminine. But John is referring to the one who spoke, that is, Christ, not to a disembodied voice³⁸⁷. Christ now continues His revelation to John by transporting him to heaven³⁸⁸.

God's reign is the central motif of this heavenly vision (chapters 4 & 5). The throne is a symbolic, apocalyptic way of showing that God is in control of all history³⁸⁹.

We are carried far above the shifting scenes of this poor world, and permitted to gaze with awe-struck eyes upon a scene of glory indescribable, and to hear things kept secret from the foundation of the world³⁹⁰.

6. Interpretation of the symbolism

(a) "behold a throne" (v.2)

When he looked in, the first Object that met his eyes was a throne and One seated on it. The Person is identified by v.8 with the God of Israel (1:4, 1:8), Who is sometimes represented in the Old Testament as making the heaven His throne (Isaiah 66:1; cf. Matthew 5:34 f., 23:22), sometimes as enthroned in heaven (Psalm 10)³⁹¹.

The word sitting (4:2) suggests to the Hebrew mind both ruling and judging; to us it has something of the notion of presiding; as such He appears to be the bishop of the presbytery of heaven³⁹². His position on the throne indicates His universal

³⁸⁷ Bratcher, p.87

³⁸⁸ Bass, p.151

³⁸⁹ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.51

³⁹⁰ Ironside, p.79

³⁹¹ Swete, p.66

³⁹² Bass, p.153

reign. The throne was “set,” His authority permanent. He is the Ancient of days, the Almighty, the Everlasting, forever the Ruler of all creation³⁹³. To this Brown adds: “The fact that He is seated underscores His double function as King and universal Judge”,³⁹⁴.

(b) “He who sat there” (v.3a).

Here we see that the whole universe is seen in a blaze of light going forth from the Throne. But God himself remains hidden in that light³⁹⁵. Although Beale feels individual meanings are not to be assigned to each of the stones as they collectively represent God’s sovereign majesty and glory³⁹⁶. One must agree with Bass that the particular qualities and colors which are designed to teach, impress us with various characteristics and qualities relate to God and His rule³⁹⁷.

The jasper seen here appears to have been translucent like glass or rock-crystal^{398 399} whereas the sardius is a precious stone of blood-red or carnation hue⁴⁰⁰. It was typical of regents in ages past to wear red/purple robes. That may be the exact idea before us. Here God is pictured in His majestic royal robes of crimson and the colors of the precious gems that surround Him⁴⁰¹.

The stones intensify the light around the throne by reflecting the unapproachable brightness, and hence glory, surrounding God himself (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16; Psalm 104:2)⁴⁰².

³⁹³ Fogle, p.135

³⁹⁴ Brown, op.cit.

³⁹⁵ Bass, op.cit.

³⁹⁶ Beale, p.320

³⁹⁷ Bass, op.cit.

³⁹⁸ Swete, p.67

³⁹⁹ Utley, op.cit.

⁴⁰⁰ Utley, Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Bass, pp.153-54

⁴⁰² Beale, p.321

Ironside poses a meaning of glory and of sacrifice⁴⁰³ radiated by these stones while Henry gives it the meaning of the glorious perfections of God and the justice of God, that essential attribute of which He never divests Himself in favor of any, but gloriously exerts it in the government of the world, and especially of the church, through our Lord Jesus Christ⁴⁰⁴. Yeatts supports Henry in saying the sardius probably connotes the wrath of God, since red is frequently tied to God's anger (Exodus 24:17; Ezekiel 1:27)⁴⁰⁵.

It would not be farfetched to say the jasper was the simple presence of God. He who says He is Light, the God who had appeared above the Mercy Seat in the Old Testament, the Shekinah Glory God in utter pure crystal. It speaks of the absolute holiness of God. Sardius is a fiery red, an angry red. He, who is utter Holiness and utter Purity must of necessity, be at the same time be angry against sin. This in synchronization with image of the risen Christ we have seen so far.

(c) “A rainbow around the throne” (v.3b).

The emphasis of the rainbow has been greatly conjectured but there are two main theories: (1) some see it as an allusion to Genesis 9:16, where the rainbow is a symbol of God's covenant protection and a sign that the storm is over; in the midst of judgment there was promise and mercy; (2) others relate it to Ezekiel 1:28, a symbol of the glory of God⁴⁰⁶.

Most commentators view this rainbow as a complete circle (typical of God's perfection and eternity: not a half circle as the earthly rainbow) surrounding the

⁴⁰³ Ironside, p.80

⁴⁰⁴ Henry, op.cit.

⁴⁰⁵ Yeatts, p.97

⁴⁰⁶ Utley, op.cit.

throne vertically (for example Jamieson⁴⁰⁷ and Yeatts⁴⁰⁸) while Easley states that we can't really know whether this encircled the throne horizontally or vertically or whether it was like an aura or halo⁴⁰⁹.

To some the color of the rainbow surrounding God's throne is also in dispute. Bratcher states: "The important thing in the comparison with the emerald, a green-colored precious stone, is not the color (a green rainbow would be a strange sight indeed, even in a vision) but its brilliance⁴¹⁰.

However, as Jamieson said, the rainbow's various colors, which combined form one pure solar ray, symbolize the varied aspects of God's providential dealings uniting in one harmonious whole⁴¹¹. For Jamieson the predominant color among the prismatic colors is green, the most refreshing of colors to look upon, and so symbolizing God's consolatory promises in Christ to His people amidst judgments on His foes⁴¹². It perhaps symbolizes the reviving and refreshing nature of the new covenant in Christ Jesus^{413 414}. This symbol refers to the mercy of God, with the rainbow of God's mercy encircling the wrath and purity of God. This states in symbolic language the truth that God's pure essence includes both wrath and mercy; to eliminate either in the interests of consistency distorts God's nature. Paradoxically, they coexist in the divine character⁴¹⁵.

The visual statement of the colors and light emanating from the throne says the God who sits on His throne ruling the universe is a God of holiness, justice, and

⁴⁰⁷ Jamieson, op.cit.

⁴⁰⁸ Yeatts, op.cit.

⁴⁰⁹ Easley, p.75

⁴¹⁰ Bratcher, pp.88-89

⁴¹¹ Jamieson, op.cit.

⁴¹² Jamieson, Ibid.

⁴¹³ Henry, op.cit.

⁴¹⁴ Fogle, p.136

⁴¹⁵ Yeatts, op.cit.

mercy. The events to be described later in Revelation bear this out⁴¹⁶. Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges (Habakkuk 3:2). Usually, a rainbow appears after the storm; but here, we see it before the storm⁴¹⁷. God's actions of judgment portrayed in the following visions will be tempered with considerations of mercy – even as judge, God will be gracious to His true people⁴¹⁸.

(d) “Twenty-four elders” (v.4)

Who are the elders? The number 24 is found nowhere else in apocalyptic literature. Revelation itself uses the number only in this one instance. Some have linked the number to the 24 astral divinities of the Babylonian religion, some to the 24 priestly courses of the Jews. More likely the number is based on that of the tribes of Israel: 12 elders would represent the chosen people of the Old Testament, and 12 others the New Israel. Thus the group of 24 elders stands for the ideal Church in its entirety^{419 420 421 422 423 424 425}. They are the new Israel, the Jewish and Gentile believers who were one in Christ. The Church idealized and therefore seen as already clad in white, crowned, and enthroned in the Divine Presence—a state yet future (ὁ δὲ ἔει γενέσθαι), but already potentially realized in the Resurrection and Ascension of the Head; cf. Eph. 2:6⁴²⁶.

⁴¹⁶ Elwell, [electronic ed.]

⁴¹⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁴¹⁸ Beale, op.cit.

⁴¹⁹ Brown, op.cit.

⁴²⁰ Beale, p.322.

⁴²¹ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, op.cit.

⁴²² Henry, op.cit.

⁴²³ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁴²⁴ Elwell, op.cit.

⁴²⁵ Jamieson, op.cit.

⁴²⁶ Swete, p.68

Thus, the elders in Revelation would appear, at face value, to be representatives of God's people, the senate sitting in council around their Bishop⁴²⁷. They have been granted kingly authority with Him over the nations (2:26–27). Apostates will be forced to bow before them (3:9), and that they are seated with Christ on His Throne (3:21)⁴²⁸. Their sitting denotes their honor, rest, and satisfaction; their sitting about the throne signifies their relation to God, their nearness to Him, the sight and enjoyment they have of Him. They are clothed in white raiment, the righteousness of the saints, both imputed and inherent; they had on their heads crowns of gold, signifying the honor and authority given them of God, and the glory they have with Him. All these may in a lower sense be applied to the gospel church on earth, in its worshipping assemblies; and, in the higher sense, to the church triumphant in heaven⁴²⁹. The Church's victory over persecution is part of the victory God has won in Christ⁴³⁰.

Numbers in the book of Revelation give ideas, not figures. The figure 24 is the symbol of the complete Church uniting the believers of the Old and the New Covenant. 12 is made of 2 numbers that we will come across very often in the book. The numbers are 3 and 4. 3×4 is 12, but $3+4$ is 7 which is another number that is basic to the Bible. What does 3 stand for? 3 – the Trinity, God in His Tri-Unity. 4 – denotes the meaning of God in Trinity working in the totality of the world, i.e. God working His purpose out in the world: $3 \times 4 = 12$. And when God was working the totality of His purpose in the Old Testament we get the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was the unfolding of God's purposes to man. In the New Testament when God was working out His purposes, He did it through His 12 Apostles. The 24

⁴²⁷ Bass, p.155

⁴²⁸ Bass, Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Henry, op.cit.

⁴³⁰ Yeatts, p.99

Elders are a symbol of the Church of all ages. The Church as a whole is clothed with glory, authority and splendor in God's presence – the most privileged space in the universe⁴³¹.

If these 24 elders represent the Church, and I believe it does, then it says something about believers – even those being mercilessly persecuted for their faith. It says we are seated in the Heavenly places. To be seated in the presence of a Holy God means that you have some rights with that God. To be seated in that Presence you must be somebody. Romans 8:16-17 describes that status: "...we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together". The true rulers of the universe under the only Ruler of the universe, is the Church.

(e) **"Lightnings and seven Spirits" (v.5)**

The echoes keep coming. The image bears resemblance to the receiving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The characteristics were lightning and noise. The whole mountain thundered. The two oldest manuscripts transpose, "voices and thunderings"⁴³². These are the signs that traditionally express the power and glory of God⁴³³ as they indicate God's presence [and] His judgments⁴³⁴. The thunderings express God's threats against the ungodly, and not only does He threaten generally, He also predicts special judgments⁴³⁵.

The giving of the Law was a horrific fearsome thing. John sees the ultimate Throne and it's a reminder that the God who gave the Law sits upon the Throne and demands the absolute keeping of the Law. Any infraction of it is sin. He is the one

⁴³¹ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

⁴³² Jamieson, op.cit.

⁴³³ Brown, op.cit.

⁴³⁴ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.52

⁴³⁵ Jamieson, op.cit.

who is fiery red sardius – the awful declarations that God makes to his church of his sovereign will and pleasure⁴³⁶.

Ironside describes it gracefully: “There are circumstances connected with that Throne which make it clear that a dreadful storm is about to burst on that world below, from which they are viewed as having so lately come. Lightnings, thunderings, and voices tell of this; and as we go on in the study of the book, we shall see more added from time to time as conditions become increasingly solemn”⁴³⁷.

The torches allude to the lampstands in the temple of God (Exodus 25:31–40; Zechariah 4:2, 10). The seven Spirits connote the complete Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4; Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 5:6). Here, the Spirit is with God in heaven. The emphasis in this context is on the Holy Spirit’s work in creating and preserving the natural world⁴³⁸. These seven torches resemble completeness⁴³⁹, not seven distinct Spirits, but the one Holy Spirit in the sevenfold plenitude of His power⁴⁴⁰. The Holy Spirit is the light-and-life Giver and fiery purifier of the godly, and consumer of the ungodly⁴⁴¹. As Henry puts it: “[These are] the various gifts, graces, and operations of the Spirit of God in the churches of Christ; which are all dispensed according to the will and pleasure of him who sits upon the throne”⁴⁴².

Also, another precious revelation is made in this passage concerning the Trinity. In verse one we are presented with the voice of Christ, in verse three we see the glory of the Father, now in verse five we are introduced again to the sevenfold Spirits of God. So here again, as in so many other cases in the New Testament, we are given a subtle picture of God in Trinity. It is the Triune God who made the first

⁴³⁶ Henry, op.cit.

⁴³⁷ Ironside, p.84

⁴³⁸ Yeatts, op.cit.

⁴³⁹ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁴⁴⁰ Ironside, op.cit.

⁴⁴¹ Jamieson, op.cit.

⁴⁴² Henry, op.cit.

covenant; it is the same Triune God that now abolishes that covenant with Israel and makes a New Covenant with the Church⁴⁴³.

(f) “Sea of glass and four living creatures” (v.6)

There have been numerous theories about the sea of glass: (1) it refers to the laver in the Temple (cf. 1Kings 7:23; 2Chronicles 4:2–6); (2) it is related to the concept of the crystal sea found in Exodus 24:9–10; (3) it sounds like the portable throne chariot of God in Ezekiel 1:22, 26; 10:1; or (4) it is a symbol of separation from the holiness of God (cf. 15:3).

Wood comments: “Twice John saw in heaven ‘as it were a sea of glass’, ‘before the throne’ of God ‘like crystal’ (Rev. 4:6) and later ‘mingled with fire’ (Rev. 15:2). The likeness to crystal speaks of the holy purity of heaven; the mingling with fire suggests the wrath of God. Beside or on the sea stand the victors over the beast: their song (Rev. 15:3) recalls that of the Israelites beside the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1ff.)”⁴⁴⁴.

Jamieson writes: “Thus, primarily, the pure ether which separates God’s throne from John, and from all things before it, may be meant, symbolizing the purity, calmness, and majesty of God’s rule”⁴⁴⁵.

Smith comments:

You can’t readily get to that Throne as there is a great sea of glass separating you. The sea of glass is the reminder that because God is Holy; that He is separated. He is Other than me. He isn’t a creature, He is the Creator and every time I come to God I realize that He is Other than myself. I have a beginning; He is the Unbeginning One Who began me. God doesn’t need me. God was self-sufficient before anything was made. God is totally self-sufficient in Himself. I, on the other hand, am a heap of

⁴⁴³ Bass, p.156

⁴⁴⁴ Wood, p.1070

⁴⁴⁵ Jamieson, op.cit

needs. I need God, I need air, I need water, I need other people. There is a sea of glass between us, a sea of holiness, a sea of Other⁴⁴⁶.

At the parting of the Red Sea (type) Israel's enemies were destroyed and it resulted in great joy and songs of praise. At the parting of the veil of the temple (type) the enemies of the world were defeated which resulted in eternal praise to God. Paul writes: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Philippians 2:15). In John's vision the sea of glass (antitype) separates God from all others just like the veil in the temple did. The only way we can breach that sea to God is through Jesus Christ our Lord and High Priest. It is interesting to observe that the sea is removed in Revelation 21:1, showing the curse (cf. Genesis 3) of mankind's sin and separation has been removed⁴⁴⁷.

It is somewhat difficult to imagine the exact place of the four living creatures. But what is important is the meaning of the details: The situation of the creatures in the midst of the throne signifies that they are in immediate contact with God, whereas their position around the throne shows their universal action in the created world that they represent and govern in God's name⁴⁴⁸.

The background for this symbol is found in the seraphim and cherubim, the latter of which were pictured on the mercy seat on top of the ark, the dwelling place of God (Exodus 25:17–22; 37:7–9; 1Samuel 4:4; 2Samuel 6:2; Psalm 18:10; 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 6:1–7)⁴⁴⁹. Utley agrees with Yeatts: "These living creatures are described in vv. 6–8. They are a combination of the cherubim of Ezekiel 1:18 and 10:17 and the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2, 3. The numbers of wings and faces vary, but it is a composite

⁴⁴⁶ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

⁴⁴⁷ Utley, op.cit.

⁴⁴⁸ Brown, op.cit.

⁴⁴⁹ Yeatts, p.100

picture of these human/animal/angels which surround the throne of God (cf. 4:6, 8, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5, 7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4)⁴⁵⁰.

They are covered with eyes (see also Ezek. 1:18), symbolizing their vast knowledge of all things, and they never cease (“day and night”) giving praise to God in words similar to those in Isaiah 6:3^{451 452}.

If what John saw in the second vision is the “Court of Heaven”, a cosmic Holy of Holies⁴⁵³, then the explanation of the detail of the vision should be found in the earthly model. John also seems to suggest in Revelation that the “heavenly sanctuary” follows the pattern of the earthly tabernacle and temple (see Heb. 9:23). All of heaven is God’s sanctuary for those who serve before His holy throne (Rev. 7:15)⁴⁵⁴. This idea shall remain constant in this dissertation.

(g) “A sealed scroll” (5:1-3)

This scroll is absolutely full. There was so much to say, not only on the inside but on the back as well (ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπίσθεν). It was literally overflowing with words. It had an abundance of content so pressing in its urgency that every inch had to be used to get it all down⁴⁵⁵. However it was sealed with seven seals as if to ensure perfect security⁴⁵⁶. The fact that the book was sealed meant that its content was established. It was written and was not to be changed, though it was about to be revealed. The sealing process has always been done to secure a matter and make it

⁴⁵⁰ Utley, op.cit.

⁴⁵¹ Elwell, op.cit.

⁴⁵² Utley, op.cit.

⁴⁵³ Swete, p.65

⁴⁵⁴ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁴⁵⁵ Bass, p.163

⁴⁵⁶ Swete, p.74

established⁴⁵⁷. The book had been completely and totally shut by God himself⁴⁵⁸. The key to the content, however, is to a great extent revealed from v.2 onwards.

This book was in the hand of the sovereign God of power. Whatever this book is, it is connected with God's sovereignty, His ruling of His world. It was connected with His power wherewith He rules His world. It is not the idea of God holding tightly to the book, but God holding it out for someone to take and open⁴⁵⁹.

In studying the Book of the Revelation it is never necessary to fall back on our own imagination as to what a particular symbol means. Every symbol is explained, or alluded to, somewhere else in the Bible⁴⁶⁰.

In Jeremiah 32 the prophet receives a word from the Lord saying: “Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you, saying, ‘Buy my field which is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption is yours to buy it’” (v.7). It happened exactly as the Lord said and then Jeremiah knew “that this was the word of the Lord” (v.8).

The title-deeds were made out and sealed and hidden away. The land was purchased by Jeremiah, but he was not going to enter into possession of it. He, too, was to be driven out [to Babilon] —to be rejected and set to one side; but some day that sealed roll would be of great value, when the restoration took place. He gave it to his secretary to hide away with a view of making known to his heirs where the deed which was to give them the title to the land was⁴⁶¹.

Ironside explains:

The book that John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne is the title-deed to this world; and when God says, “Who is worthy to take the book and to loose the

⁴⁵⁷ Fogle, pp.145-46

⁴⁵⁸ Easley, p.91

⁴⁵⁹ Robert James Dr. Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.53

⁴⁶⁰ Ironside, p.89

⁴⁶¹ Ironside, pp.90-91

seals thereof?” it is just another way of saying. Who is the rightful heir? Who can say, “I have title to break those seals, title to claim that world, it belongs to me?” Who is worthy to take possession of that world and subject it to himself? Adam, what about you? Wasn’t that world given to you? When God created you and placed you in the Garden of Eden, did He not say that all of this was yours? Why do you not come forward and take this title-deed and claim your property? Adam says, “I forfeited my inheritance because of sin. It was mine, but I sinned it away. The devil cheated me out of it, and I have no longer any title to it.” Is there any angel who can step up and take the book? No, not an angel among all the serried ranks of heaven’s hosts can say, “I have title to that world.” Not a man in all God’s universe can say, “It is mine”⁴⁶²

The words of Satan in the desert when he tempted Christ ring true of Ironside’s comment: “Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours’” (Luke 4:5-7).

No person or being in the Heavens could open the book that holds the decrees or the will of God. In this book was written all that God purposed for mankind. Here were all the joy filled plans that God had for man and at the Garden of Eden when man fell, man put on the seven seals with his sin. And man had sealed up the purposes of God for himself. It includes God’s complete plan for redeeming the world⁴⁶³. Man could not enjoy God’s purposes. Man was made to sit in the heavenly places. Man was made to walk with God, but man has effectively sealed up that will and purpose so that he can no longer enjoy God’s purposes. The only one who could

⁴⁶² Ironside, p.89

⁴⁶³ Yeatts, p.109

reopen the book was man. That is the point. Man had a choice and whatever man did, God said, that is the way it will be on earth. Man was made an under-god, a vice-lord. God said he would not do anything on earth directly, He would only do it through man, therefore the decisions and choices of man on earth were final. Whatever man said on earth was final, that is the way it is. And man handed the planet over to the Devil. Man sold himself a slave to sin and Satan. If ever man is going to be free – if man is ever going to open that roll of God’s purposes and see what God willed for him it must be man who does it⁴⁶⁴.

Nowhere was such a man found – neither in heaven nor on earth. Nowhere was there a man found worthy. Note the use of the word “worthy”. It doesn’t say strong enough or knowledgeable enough, but *worthy* enough “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

If the scroll is not opened, God’s plan will not be fulfilled. This passage is a dramatic build-up to demonstrate the importance of the death of Jesus Christ⁴⁶⁵.

(h) “I wept much”(vv.4-5)

If we follow the argument that the book contained judgments still future to us, it is then impossible to explain why John wept so much. “Wept much” is of enormous importance. Whatever was in that book was vital to him right there and then, and to those that he oversaw on the mainland, in fact, for ages of Christians to come⁴⁶⁶.

⁴⁶⁴ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

⁴⁶⁵ Yeatts, p.110

⁴⁶⁶ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

John was weeping greatly, for whoever can take away sin and its bondage, that person himself must be without sin, and whoever takes away sin and bondage from the human race must himself be at least equal in worth to the entire race⁴⁶⁷.

Smith notes that John does not weep anywhere else in the book although he saw very sad things. But when he saw this he is so overwhelmed that he wept *greatly* “for no one was found worthy”.

But as he was weeping, one of the elders said, “Weep not, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to take the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” And John looked for the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the majestic roaring King of Beasts, ready to spring upon the prey; but he beheld a Lamb. Why, the Lamb *is* the Lion! The Lamb of God is the Lion of Judah’s tribe. The Lamb that speaks of innocence, of meekness, of gentleness and sacrifice, is the One who is to go forth as the mighty conqueror and claim this world as His own, and drive all His enemies from before His face. The translation of Weymouth is very apt here. He says, “I saw in the midst of the throne a lamb that looked as though it had been offered in sacrifice,”—the Lamb in the very glory of God that will have through all eternity the marks of death upon His glorified body!⁴⁶⁸

The completeness of the seal emphasizes that only the person who can fulfill in its totality God’s redemption described in the scroll can open it. That person is Jesus Christ, who died and rose from death to accomplish fully God’s redemption. Ladd affirms that “apart from the person and redeeming work of Jesus Christ, history is an enigma”. No matter how intense persecution becomes, the Christian can take

⁴⁶⁷ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ironside, op.cit.

courage because Christ's redemption has already been accomplished by what Christ has done⁴⁶⁹.

When He came forth from the tomb, the print of the nails was there. When John saw Him many years after in a vision up there in glory, he saw a Lamb that looked as though it had once been offered in sacrifice; and when we get home to heaven we will never make any mistake in identifying Him⁴⁷⁰.

The scroll represents Christ's "title deed" to all that the Father promised Him because of His sacrifice on the cross. "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen [nations] for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psalm 2:8 KJV). Jesus Christ is the "Heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). He is our beloved "Kinsman-Redeemer" who was willing to give His life to set us free from bondage and to restore our lost inheritance (see Leviticus 25:23–46; Ruth; Jeremiah 32:6–15)⁴⁷¹.

No wonder Paul exclaims: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3) and "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2Corinthians 1:20)!

The worthy Man was found – "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1Timothy 2:4-6). He is from the lineage of David, born from a virgin girl Mary, and in "all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17) "coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7) "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15) "that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God" (Hebrews 2:17).

⁴⁶⁹ Yeatts, p.109

⁴⁷⁰ Ironside, pp.92-93

⁴⁷¹ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

The subsequent spontaneous hymn in Revelation 5:9-10, 12-13 says it all:
“Worthy is the Lamb!”

(i) “A Lamb” (v.6)

Again the central focus is our Lord Jesus Christ – in the center of all things. He is not only in the midst of the Church (the 24 elders), but He is also in the midst of the Throne.

People in John’s day were certainly familiar with seeing slaughtered animals in the meat markets. Nowhere, however, had they seen a slaughtered, bloody animal standing on a king’s throne!⁴⁷² This concept of a sacrificial Lamb depicts the vicarious atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷³

He wasn’t even seen until He came forth from the midst of the heavenly throne. He was seated there, exalted at the right hand of God the Father (Ephesians 1:20–23), yet He did not overshadow the Father. Jesus has been manifested to us as part of the Trinity, and we should not forget that He is God. He, the Father and the Spirit are One⁴⁷⁴.

The vision doesn’t focus on the Lamb’s position before He is announced, although we could argue that He was either in the “bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), or He was “of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7) during His earthly ministry. Either way it makes no difference as the focus is on the presentation of the Lamb-Lion before God making atonement for mankind. However, Smith does present a tantalizing explanation that shall be dealt with in v.7.

⁴⁷² Easley, pp.92-93

⁴⁷³ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.54

⁴⁷⁴ Fogle, p.149

V.6 is crucial to understanding how “the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, overcame”. There is no doubt that v.6 portrays Jesus as resurrected and that the resurrection is essential to his overcoming. He conquered death by being raised from the dead. But the present victorious effect of the Lamb’s overcoming resides not only in the fact that the Lamb continues to “stand” but also in the fact that it continues to exist as a slaughtered Lamb; the perfect participle ἐσφαγμένον (“having been slain”) expresses an abiding condition as a result of the past act of being slain (like the perfect tense “crucified” in 1Corinthians 2:2)⁴⁷⁵.

About the image of the freshly slaughtered Lamb, Yeatts comments: “Instead of the military symbol of the lion, the image of the Lamb that was slain appears. This presents a dominant theme of Revelation—overcoming, not through military strength and killing, but through suffering and death”.⁴⁷⁶

Just as strange as the portrayal of the Lamb as the Lion, just as strange is a Lamb with seven horns! The imagery portrays a power message.

The horn as the symbol of strength is an old Hebrew metaphor which occurs first in Deuteronomy 33:17, where Ephraim is said to have the horns of the שׁוֹר, LXX. μονοκέρως (a species of wild ox)⁴⁷⁷. Just as horns speak of power, seven speaks of perfection. Perfect power (the fullness of His power⁴⁷⁸) belongs to the Lamb of God⁴⁷⁹. Christ is omnipotent⁴⁸⁰.

With the fullness of strength the Lamb possesses also the fullness of vision, symbolized by seven eyes; cf. 4:6, 4:8, where the ζῶα have eyes before and behind,

⁴⁷⁵ Beale, p.352

⁴⁷⁶ Yeatts, p.110

⁴⁷⁷ Swete, p.77

⁴⁷⁸ Swete, Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ironside, p.94

⁴⁸⁰ Bass, p.168

around and within, yet do not possess the plenary illumination ascribed to the Lamb⁴⁸¹. The seven fold eyes are symbolic of His omniscience⁴⁸².

The seven eyes are interpreted as meaning seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the world, which we have connected with Isaiah 2:1, 2. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ⁴⁸³. He has received the Holy Spirit without measure, in all perfection of light, and life, and power, by which He is able to teach and rule all parts of the earth⁴⁸⁴. The seven eyes of God become the seven eyes of the Lamb. It is of significance that God and Christ (the Lamb) are identified in this way. The Holy Spirit is sent from God and Christ⁴⁸⁵.

We have here perfect power (seven horns), perfect wisdom (seven eyes), and perfect presence (seven Spirits in all the earth)⁴⁸⁶. The diminutive form of the word *lamb* (*arnion*) is used as a counter-image of the beast (*thērion*). Eller contrasts the little lambkin with the vicious monster: the tiny Lamb conquers the awesome beast⁴⁸⁷.

He is going to put everything right, but He will have to act in judgment to do so. The very world in which the Lord Jesus died is going to be the sphere in which the glory of God will be displayed⁴⁸⁸.

(j) “He took the scroll” (v.7)

The authority and personal qualifications allow this One to approach to the very presence of the Father and take from him the book. Although Bass argues that Christ took the book from him who sits on the Throne by right of family relationship

⁴⁸¹ Swete, op.cit.

⁴⁸² Bass, op.cit.

⁴⁸³ Ironside, op.cit.

⁴⁸⁴ Henry, op.cit.

⁴⁸⁵ Elwell, op.cit.

⁴⁸⁶ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁴⁸⁷ Yeatts, p.111

⁴⁸⁸ Ironside, p.95

and of the Son's intimacy with the Father⁴⁸⁹, we understand from the context that it really had to do with the blood of the sacrifice for sins presented by the slaughtered Lamb. He to whom all power was given in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28.) is the only One who can penetrate the mysteries and dispense the power of God's right hand⁴⁹⁰.

The passage portrays One who "comes (ἔρχομαι) before God's throne" to receive authority to reign after a book (or books) has (have) been opened⁴⁹¹. Commentators generally understand Revelation 5 as an enthronement scene^{492 493}.

The verb translated "took" does not imply force. Some translate "received" (see the same verb in 3:3), implying that God offered it to the Lamb⁴⁹⁴. The Lamb takes it from the Father in token of formal investiture into His universal and everlasting dominion as Son of man. This introductory vision thus presents before us, in summary, the consummation to which all the events in the seals, trumpets, and vials converge, namely, the setting up of Christ's kingdom visibly⁴⁹⁵.

Smith suggests that what was seen here is exactly what happened to Jesus after he left Mary Magdalene at the tomb. When Mary saw Jesus in the Garden after the resurrection Jesus said: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (John 20:17). John's vision in Revelation 5 is a symbolic picture of what happened – His coming into the Throne Room. Where did He come from? He had just been to the brazen altar of sacrifice. He had just been slain at the cross, the blood has been shed, and now He Who is the offering and the Priest at the same time, brings His own blood into the presence of the Father. And it is

⁴⁸⁹ Bass, op.cit.

⁴⁹⁰ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Revelation*, p.165

⁴⁹¹ Beale, p.356

⁴⁹² Beale, p.357

⁴⁹³ Brown, op.cit.

⁴⁹⁴ Bratcher, p.102

⁴⁹⁵ Jamieson, op.cit.

because of that blood that He can take the book. It is because of that blood that He is worthy. He has ascended into the presence of His Father - the finished work of Christ⁴⁹⁶.

These scenes are the key to history. “Understand where Jesus is and you will understand what history is about”⁴⁹⁷.

(k) “And they sang a new song”(v.9)

The new song is in effect a new *kind* of song. καινήν is translated as “new, unused, unknown, strange, remarkable”⁴⁹⁸. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders then sing a new song, because Christ’s redemption begins a new era⁴⁹⁹ - an extraordinary event (Is 42:10)⁵⁰⁰. The song is *new* because it is only now, subsequent to the accomplishment of Christ’s work of redemption, that the song can be sung⁵⁰¹.

The song had not been sung before. Moses and the children of Israel sang a similar song of praise and worship which declared their jubilation in being set free from the bondage of Egypt (Exodus 15). The old song of Moses prefigured the new song of the Church. This new song has been the new song of deliverance since Jesus’ earthly ministry and will continue to be forever^{502 503}. The “new song” celebrates the defeat of the powers of evil and sin⁵⁰⁴.

Easley comments: “John now hears the elders—perhaps joined by the living creatures—singing a new song, one with a different focus than their original song

⁴⁹⁶ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

⁴⁹⁷ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Arndt, pp.496-97

⁴⁹⁹ Yeatts, p.112

⁵⁰⁰ Brown, op.cit.

⁵⁰¹ Spence-Jones, op.cit.

⁵⁰² Fogle, pp.153-54

⁵⁰³ Swete, p.79

⁵⁰⁴ Beale, p.358

(Rev. 4:11). If the original song was the ‘Creation Song from the Elders,’ this is the ‘Redemption Song from the Elders’⁵⁰⁵ in honor of the Lamb⁵⁰⁶.

Wiersbe analyses the content and comments that the new song is *a worship hymn* ascribing worth to the Lamb. It is also *a Gospel song* proclaiming salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ to all people. It is *a devotional hymn* for it announced our unique position in Christ as “a kingdom of priests”, and it is *a prophetic hymn* stating “We shall reign on the earth” (5:10). He concludes: “What a marvelous hymn! How rich would be our worship if only we would blend all these truths in honoring Him!”⁵⁰⁷.

How can Jesus be the warrior Messiah—“the Root of David” and “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”—and be a little sacrificial Lamb at the same time? Once again, the hymn serves to interpret the preceding vision. Jesus is the Messiah who makes war, who conquers, who “overcomes” by dying. The Lamb conquers by dying on the cross as the sacrifice that cancels sin in the sense of annihilating the “present evil age” and inaugurating the kingdom of God. It is Christ, then, who is able to open the scroll with seven seals and put into effect God’s plan of redemption for his creation⁵⁰⁸.

7. Meaning of the vision

First of all our attention is on the Throne. It is an immense feeling of peace to know that the very first thing John saw in the center of the Universe was a Throne.

θρόνος (“throne”) as God’s Throne occurs 17 times in chapters 4–5 (of 38 occurrences in chapters 4–22)⁵⁰⁹. The Throne is a dominant image occurring in

⁵⁰⁵ Easley, p.94

⁵⁰⁶ Bratcher, p.104

⁵⁰⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, op.cit.

⁵⁰⁸ Davis, p.179

⁵⁰⁹ Beale, p.320

seventeen of the twenty-two chapters of Revelation⁵¹⁰. Utley suggests the term “throne” is used over 47 times in this book⁵¹¹. The high frequency in chapters 4–5 emphasizes that, although God’s realm is separated from the earthly, he is nevertheless in control over earth’s affairs. Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run and to cause God’s people to suffer, they can know that his hand superintends everything for their good and his glory⁵¹².

In 95 AD Christianity looked like a failure. If you were a Christian you were pretty well signing up for some kind of martyrdom. You certainly had to have a martyr’s mind. They didn’t preach a gospel of “If you want joy, peace, health, wealth and healing – come to Jesus”. It was rather “If you want to be thrown to the lions, lose your job, lose your house – come to Jesus”⁵¹³. With that type of gospel, one could lose any feeling that God is in control. However, the very first thing that John saw: “Behold a Throne”. Far above the throne of Domitian, far above the wars and atrocities, far above all that Rome will ever do, there is a Throne and God is ultimately in control. This then may serve as assurance to Christians who suffer that their God is sovereign and has not forgotten them because he has not forgotten their persecutors, whom he will surely judge by fire (e.g., 19:20; 20:9–10; 21:8)⁵¹⁴.

Next our focus is turned to the fact that believers in Christ have a new covenant with God – they are God’s beloved, respected and honored. They are privileged above all created beings to sit in the presence of the Holy God and “also reign with Him” (2Timothy 2:12). Whereas the first covenant was between God and fallible Abraham, the new covenant is between God and infallible Jesus and consequently with everybody who are in Christ Jesus. It is a permanent and eternal

⁵¹⁰ Yeatts, p.97

⁵¹¹ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.51

⁵¹² Beale, op.cit.

⁵¹³ Smith, *The Lamb on the Throne*, op.cit.

⁵¹⁴ Beale, pp.326-27

covenant. The old is surpassed by the new which is overwhelming in glory and splendor – the same glory and splendor that emanates from the Throne.

Finally we see that Christ conquers. He is the Messiah who makes war, who conquers, who “overcomes” by dying. The Lamb conquers by dying on the cross as the sacrifice that cancels sin⁵¹⁵. God’s display of power in the world comes in the form of a lamb. It is so different from the worldly system and values. The world displays teeth, nails, horns and beaks as symbols of might, but God displays a lamb! Christ taught his disciples to be unlike the world. Their mighty men lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them, but “it shall not be so among you” (Mat 25:26). The servant, the slave will be the leader. It is in weakness that God’s strength is made perfect “that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2Corinthians 4:7). “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1Corinthians 1:27-29). For this reason then Paul wrote: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2Corinthians 12:10). The power that is exerted by the Lamb and His followers are the power and majesty observed around the Throne – it is the power of God. Just as the Lamb was slaughtered and by that conquered, just so His followers conquer even though destroyed.

PART 2 – THE SECOND VISION ii (6:1-7:17)

⁵¹⁵ Davis, op.cit.

In the first part of the second vision we saw the Lamb conquering by dying on the cross as the sacrifice that cancels sin in the sense of annihilating the “present evil age” and inaugurating the kingdom of God⁵¹⁶. The second part of the second vision has to do with the effects thereof. What happens when the Lamb reigns?

The series of visions which follows can be seen in history, anywhere, everywhere wherever the Lamb is proclaimed as the Ruler. It doesn't matter whether it is AD 95 or 2011 or any other time. This is why this book is a blessing to everyone who reads it, because it is for all people under the reign of Christ. The principles of this book are applicable to anyone, any time, anywhere.

The second vision of John alludes to the book of Zechariah, although the images in John's vision are more detailed and vivid.

(a) “The first seal” (6:1-2)

Some Bible versions have added subheadings that can be very confusing or even misleading. One such an example is the *New American Standard Bible*, electronic edition (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1986). The subheading for the first seal reads “First Seal—False Christ”. This should be disregarded as it is not based on exegesis or hermeneutics, but rather seems to be the opinion of the editors (not the translators).

Two white horses appear in Revelation; the first in this passage and the second in chapter 19.

The identity of the first rider on the white horse has been discussed at great length by interpreters. The NET Bible provides the three basic interpretations of the rider on the white horse (although the editors' sentiments seep through). Several

⁵¹⁶ Davis, Ibid.

answers are given: (1) A number understand the rider on the white horse to be Christ himself, identifying this horse and rider with the one mentioned in 19:11, where the identification is clear (cf. 19:13, 16). (2) Others see the rider on the white horse representing a spirit of military conquest that dominates human history and leads to the catastrophes that follow. (3) Another possibility is that the white horse rider represents the Antichrist, who appears later in Rev 11:7; 13:17, and whose similarity to Christ explains the similarity with the rider in 19:11⁵¹⁷.

The two main opinions are (1) the rider is the Antichrist, with his demonic forces attempting to make Satan's influence felt across the world and instituting the Great Tribulation. This opinion is typical of those that hold to Dispensationalism although not the only one they might favor⁵¹⁸ and (2) the rider is Christ Himself leading His heavenly armies in judgment on Israel for their violation of the old covenant and their murder of their prophesied Messiah, the Lord of Glory Himself. The fact that the rider is crowned is especially important. This One has already conquered and has been crowned as a result of His victories⁵¹⁹.

Those opposing an interpretation of Christ being the rider cite the following arguments:

- (i) There is little in common between the two riders beyond the white horse. The word for "crown" is different, the armament is different, and the context here is different (conquest vs. retribution), with three other horsemen bringing following catastrophe^{520 521 522 523 524 525 526}. Swete and Davis suggest

⁵¹⁷ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* [electronic ed.]

⁵¹⁸ Bass, p.175

⁵¹⁹ Bass, Ibid.

⁵²⁰ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*, op.cit.

⁵²¹ Swete, p.84

⁵²² Bass, p.176

triumphant militarism as the meaning⁵²⁷. Bass suggests the rider is simply one of the angels of God going forth in service of God⁵²⁸. Utley suggests it may be just one of the plagues of the Old Testament.

- (ii) Christ cannot open the seal and be the seal⁵²⁹.

Those supporting Christ as the rider cite the following arguments:

- (i) White is always typical in the Revelation of heavenly things (cf. 1:14, “His hairs were white;” 2:17, “a white stone;” 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:11, and 7:9, 13, “white garments;” 14:14, “white cloud;” 19:11, 14, “white horses;” 20:11, “white throne”), and indeed in the whole of the New Testament (cf. Matthew 17:2; 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10), the only exceptions being Matthew 5:36 and John 4:35. The horse, throughout the Old Testament, is emblematic of war. Among the Romans a white horse was the symbol of victory by the one who sat on it^{530 531 532 533 534}. However, Spence-Jones suggests the abstract idea of the Church as a victorious body to be the rider.

⁵²³ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.60

⁵²⁴ Easley, p.106

⁵²⁵ Yeatts, p.125

⁵²⁶ Michaels, [electronic ed.]

⁵²⁷ Davis, p.182

⁵²⁸ Bass, p.177

⁵²⁹ Yeatts, op.cit.

⁵³⁰ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Revelation*, p.183

⁵³¹ Fogle, pp.166-67

⁵³² Henry, op.cit.

⁵³³ Elwell, op.cit.

⁵³⁴ Jamieson, op.cit.

If this is a code that is ever going to be interpreted then the code must be consistent⁵³⁵. If a white horse in chapter 6 is inconsistent with a white horse in chapter 19 without it being qualified in the passage, then a basic principle of sound exegesis has been violated. If the white horse differs in meaning from everything else white without it being clearly stated, then a basic principle of exegesis has been violated. Also, it is not rational to assume that Christ as the rider on the white horse is contextual inconsistent with the three following horsemen. It all depends on what one understands the other three horses and their riders to mean.

The result of Christ being crowned Lord of lords and King of kings is that it should be announced. This is the preaching of the Gospel. As Christ rides forth He conquers the hearts of man with the News that has power to save (Romans 1:16). He is shown bringing forth God's Word, the New Covenant of grace. He is going forth, by the Spirit of God, conquering and to conquer with the intent to save and foster life, not to destroy it⁵³⁶. The Kingdom of God has come and is preached in all four corners of the earth. At first the arrows are painful as light enters the dark corners of one's heart. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). We are ready to think, when the gospel goes forth, that it should carry all the world before it, but it often meets with opposition, and moves slowly; however, Christ will do his own work effectually, in his own time and way⁵³⁷.

There is little one can do about God's arrows. They stick and they stick fast. Jesus said to Paul: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14). One either gives in and be conquered by the Victor or resists by hardening one's heart.

⁵³⁵ Smith, *The Six Seals*, [Online Available]

⁵³⁶ Fogle, op.cit.

⁵³⁷ Henry, op.cit.

Such a man will be overcome with great calamity. The writer in Proverbs observes: “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). He conquers His enemies in His people; their sins are their enemies and His enemies; when Christ comes with power into their soul He begins to conquer these enemies, and He goes on conquering, in the progressive work of sanctification, till He has gained us a complete victory⁵³⁸.

On the other hand, those who bow to the Victor will also be “hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; ...perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2Corinthians 4:8-9). We will deal more with this when we get to the other riders.

About the argument that Christ cannot open the seal and be the seal: It is not impossible at all. Christ is simultaneously the Sacrifice and the High Priest presenting the Sacrifice. There is therefore no reason why He cannot open the seal and be the first Rider of the seal. After all, everything is in essence about Him. He is the Alpha and Omega – the Beginning and the End.

(b) “The second seal” (vv.3-4)

Those who do not view the first rider as the victorious Christ conquering the hearts of man through the gospel, will also be on a different path regarding the second rider and his horse. For those who did interpret the first rider as such the meaning is clear. There were wars, famine and death since the fall of man, but what is depicted in this vision is not stating the obvious of man’s fallen state. It is a specific message to those being persecuted in 95 AD, as well as to all believers everywhere at any time.

⁵³⁸ Henry, op.cit.

The rider on the red horse does indicate war, but a very specific war – the war of darkness against light. This image will be reaffirmed repeatedly throughout Revelation. There will be bloodshed, but bloodshed of a specific kind. It is reminiscent of Jesus' words in John 16:2: "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service". Also, in Matthew 10:21-22: "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved".

The second rider's sword was not the symbol of civil justice (Romans 13:4) but of bloodshed. "It was given him to take Peace (τὴν εἰρήνην) from the earth and (to cause men) to slay one another"⁵³⁹.

Unlike Bass it is difficult to view the second rider as being civil war on top of the foreign war that Rome and Israel made on each other⁵⁴⁰.

The passage states very explicitly – it was granted to the rider to take the peace from the earth. He did not come galloping in and push the white horse out the way and take over. This one was given permission. The persecution that follows in his wake is granted by God⁵⁴¹. Therefore, vv. 3–8 describe how Satan attempts to conquer the saints through suffering so that they lose their faith. Yet it must be remembered that these trials are also ironically used by God ultimately as punishments for unbelievers⁵⁴².

Jesus asked the disciples in Matthew 20:22-23: "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

⁵³⁹ Swete, p.85

⁵⁴⁰ Bass, p.178

⁵⁴¹ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁴² Beale, 379

He was referring to the cup and baptism of suffering. To His question the disciples answered affirmatively to which Jesus remarked: “You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with”. They will indeed suffer for the sake of Christ, as will all believers throughout all the ages. “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:34-36). The fifth seal confirms this. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Tim 3:12). Wherever the white horse goes, the red horse follows.

However, God seems to say here: “It’s all right, the Gospel was preached, the Lamb reigns and the bloody horse that comes afterwards is all under the control of the Lamb. It’s all right. It looks as if that bloody horse has got complete control, but it hasn’t”⁵⁴³.

(c) “The third seal” (vv.5-6)

Again, those who do not understand that the breaking of the seals on the book that the Lamb purchased with His blood is the consequence of the Lamb being crowned, will have great difficulty in making sense of the context.

Many scholars and commentaries describe the third rider to be famine or scarcity, but the text does not allow a simplistic treatment of the matter. Just as with the red horse which indicated war of a special kind, this horse indicates scarcity and famine of a specific kind.

⁵⁴³ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

We see the rider on the black horse with weighing scales and a voice from the cherubim and seraphs saying: “a day’s wheat for a day’s wages or three day’s barley for a day’s wages and do not harm the oil and the wine”. In New Testament times the proportionate cost was probably three to one, as the Apocalyptist puts it here⁵⁴⁴. The Greek measure in this case was something under two pints. The proclamation, then, forbids famine prices, ensuring to the laborer a sufficiency of bread. Wheat and barley, oil and wine, were the staple food both of Palestine and Asia Minor, and the voice from the midst of the ζῶα deprecates any heavy loss in these crops⁵⁴⁵. The scales measure the normal amount of food for the acceptable price and therefor are no indication of a generalized famine, but rather of trade. Scales were widely used in marketplaces to ensure fair trade.

Many ancient writers explain that the quart was the standard daily allowance for an adult and not as Ironside suggests “just enough wheat to make a man one meal”⁵⁴⁶. Herodotus narrates that it was the daily ration of grain per man in Xerxes’ invasion army⁵⁴⁷. The words “a day’s wages” are a good rendering for the Roman coin that was the standard daily pay for a laborer⁵⁴⁸.

What is so horrific about this horse then? Black is the color indicative of distress, misfortune, or mourning⁵⁴⁹. The oil and the wine were the luxury items. There’s plenty of wheat, there is plenty of barley, there’s plenty of oil and wine if only you have the money for them. That is not famine. What is it? Smith gives a clearer picture. It is another form of persecution. As the Christians were persecuted they weren’t all killed and they weren’t all banished, but many lost their jobs. When

⁵⁴⁴ Swete, 86

⁵⁴⁵ Swete, Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ironside, p.104

⁵⁴⁷ Wood, 1237

⁵⁴⁸ Easley, pp.107-08

⁵⁴⁹ Bass, p.179

the white horse rides one may also encounter the red or the black one. Believers may be killed or they may lose their jobs. It is an economical kind of persecution – the food is there but they can't touch it. Luxury items are there, but they never get to them. Maybe even sometimes they feel it would be better to have died under the red horse than to have eked out an existence without a home or a means to support themselves. There are many places in the world today where becoming a Christian in all probability means losing your job straight away. There are many places in the world where you cannot buy or sell if you are a Christian⁵⁵⁰. This theme reoccurs in Revelation.

Just as with the red horse God seems to say here: “It’s all right, the Gospel was preached, the Lamb reigns. The bloody horse and the black horse are all under the control of the Lamb. It’s all right. It looks as if these horses have complete control, but they haven’t”⁵⁵¹.

(d) “The fourth seal” (vv.7-8)

Χλωρός is translated as yellowish-green, or a pale, greenish grey⁵⁵². The word Hades (6:8) does not mean hell; it simply means the place of the unseen dead, which may be heaven or hell. Hades is the abode of the dead. Hades means the grave; the actual pit dug in the earth, and hence never means more than death or the abode of death⁵⁵³. Death in Revelation 6:8a refers generally to loss of life or that which causes loss of life⁵⁵⁴.

⁵⁵⁰ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁵¹ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁵² Arndt, p.1085

⁵⁵³ Bass, p.181

⁵⁵⁴ Beale, p.382

God has control over what we might call natural disaster. A Christian is not isolated⁵⁵⁵. Here the doom befalling disaster victims is the focus. Death results from military disaster, natural disaster, and other untimely deaths such as wild beasts⁵⁵⁶. These kinds of tragedies have always been with us. Whether earthquakes, disease, disasters or other catastrophes, many have perished from the face of the earth. If statistics could have been kept on these throughout history they probably would total one-fourth of the population⁵⁵⁷.

How does the fourth horse relate to Christ's crowning and the proclaiming of the gospel? We understand that believers will suffer due to their faith in Christ, hence the red and black horses, but what about the pale green horse?

The Lamb that reigns is simply telling us that He has control here too. There are certain troubles the world goes through and Christians go through them in the same way. People suffer and Christians also share in those sufferings. But as the Christian goes through them he goes through them with hope, because he knows that this couldn't happen but for the Lamb who says, "Unleash the seals". The blessings of God, the purposes of God, the unrolling of that little scroll, are taking place in a fallen world. It is taking place in a world of sin and a world of men. As the book unrolls there will be the red horse of men rising up to kill the Christians. There will be the black horse of socio- economic pressure. Also, the world is in a fallen state and all the so called natural disasters will still happen. That is a principle that applies in all circumstances⁵⁵⁸.

(e) "The fifth seal" (vv.9-11)

⁵⁵⁵ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁵⁶ Easley, p.108

⁵⁵⁷ Fogle, p.172

⁵⁵⁸ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

Though no altar appears in the vision of chapter 4, its existence is assumed by the article, perhaps on the ground that the heavenly worship which the Seer had witnessed is the ἀντίτυπον of the earthly; cf. Hebrews 8:5⁵⁵⁹.

Most commentators view this altar to be the antitype of the brazen altar of sacrifice in the temple. The fact that the souls were “under the altar” alludes for most to the Levitical rite where the blood, which is the ψυχὴ of life, was poured out at the foot of the altar of burnt offering (Leviticus 4:7)⁵⁶⁰. When an animal was sacrificed, the blood of the sacrifice ran down to the base of the altar; thus the life would literally be underneath the altar (6:9)⁵⁶¹.

However, the true antitype of the brazen altar would be the cross of Jesus on Calvary. No sacrifices are made in heaven, as the one perfect Sacrifice was already made and presented to the Father. This altar is not the brazen altar of sacrifice, although the sacrificial blood was poured out at the base of that altar, and the sacrificed saints are under the altar. The better identification is with the golden altar of incense, which stood in the vicinity of the Holy of Holies (clearly referred to in 8:3–5 and 9:13 and in the developments of those references in 11:1; 14:18; and 16:7). The sacrificial blood of the Day of Atonement was poured on this altar, and incense was burned on it (Exodus 30:1–10; Leviticus 4:7; Hebrews 9:4)⁵⁶². Therefore, the imagery of the altar brings to mind the ideas of both sacrifice and prayers, as incense, asking God to vindicate those who have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake⁵⁶³. Easley comments: “This heavenly altar combines aspects of the sacrificial altar (martyrs’

⁵⁵⁹ Swete, p.88

⁵⁶⁰ Swete, Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Bass, p.184

⁵⁶² Beale, p.391

⁵⁶³ Beale, p.392

blood caught there) and the incense altar (saints' prayers offered there)" and bases it on 6:9; 8:3; 8:5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; and 16:7⁵⁶⁴.

The comparison with Jesus' suffering is enhanced by the description of the saints as "having been slain". The purpose of the comparison is to emphasize that, as with Christ, those following him will have their sacrificial suffering and apparent defeat turned into ultimate victory⁵⁶⁵. They have been persecuted for bearing witness in word and deed to Christ's redemptive work, which has its revelatory origin in God. Although Old Testament saints could be included in the picture, the emphasis is on New Testament believers because the saints are described here as those who have been persecuted for their witness to God's revelation as it has come in recent history through Christ⁵⁶⁶. Importantly, they are alive and in the presence of God. The souls of believers are not asleep or still lying in the ground awaiting a resurrection. They are with God. With the death of the physical body, we are immediately in heaven. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). All Christians who have ceased to live on the earth are eternally alive and with God⁵⁶⁷. Persecutors can only kill the body, and after that there is no more that they can do; The soul lives on⁵⁶⁸.

These saints represent all who have laid down their lives for Jesus Christ and the cause of God's truth, and they are an encouragement to all today who may be called to follow them. But is it "Christian" for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers? After all, both Jesus and Stephen prayed that God would forgive those who killed them. There is little doubt that, when they were slain on earth, these martyrs also prayed for their slayers; and this is the right thing to do

⁵⁶⁴ Easley, p.116

⁵⁶⁵ Beale, op.cit.

⁵⁶⁶ Beale, p.390

⁵⁶⁷ Fogle, p.174

⁵⁶⁸ Henry, op.cit.

(Matthew 5:10–12, 43–48). The great question, however, was not whether their enemies would be judged, but when. “How long, O Lord?” has been the cry of God’s suffering people throughout the ages (see Psalm 74:9–10; 79:5; 94:3–4; also Habakkuk 1:2). The saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness on earth, but they do not know God’s exact schedule. It is not personal revenge that they seek, but vindication of God’s holiness and the establishment of God’s justice. Every believer today who sincerely prays, “Thy kingdom come!” is echoing their petition. God made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident; and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control (Psalm 116:15); so there is nothing to fear⁵⁶⁹.

There was much for John to explain regarding the suffering of the saints and the apparent triumph of evil, facts that seem to deny the Christian confession that Christ has been raised and enthroned as Lord. Does He protect His people? Will He truly come again? Why must we suffer, and “how long, Sovereign Lord,” must we wait? The merciful but mysterious ways of God with humankind require, for the sake of completeness, the retelling of the story of human history from several points of reference, complete with the certainties of both judgment and salvation through Christ⁵⁷⁰. The martyrs call for the securing of justice. God would not be just, nor the Lord of history, if He did not punish injustice⁵⁷¹. The justice of God, the absolute necessity of His judging sinners is part of His goodness. If God looked upon sin and smiled, would He be holy and good?⁵⁷².

⁵⁶⁹ Wiersbe, op.cit.

⁵⁷⁰ Sloan, p.672

⁵⁷¹ Brown, op.cit.

⁵⁷² Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

When one thinks about it, one cannot live sanely without the wrath of God. Sanity demands the wrath of God. Is the Lamb really the ruler, or does some maniac sinner have last word. Does sin have the last word or does the Lamb?⁵⁷³.

One of the most amazing observations about the martyred saints' plea to God was the fact that they didn't ask: "Why, o God?" That is after all the most common question one hears when people suffer. David portrayed the same attitude in Psalm 52 when he asked: "Why, o man?" Abimelech helped David and Doeg the Edomite told Saul about it. Saul ordered the execution of every priest. When his soldiers refused, Doeg took it upon himself to butcher the whole village. Only Abiathar escaped (see 1 Samuel 22). David didn't ask God what He was doing or why He allowed it. Instead he asked Saul and Doeg: "Why do you boast in evil, o mighty man?" (Psalm 52:1). David's question is actually a statement of "do you think you are going to get away with this?" David could look at that merciless, senseless cruelty with sanity, because he knew that man would not get away with it. He also knew that he was saved from bitterness and resentment against them, because if God is going to judge one can safely leave the matter with God⁵⁷⁴.

The way the world treats the Church is the way history is going to unfold for those persecutors.

(f) "The sixth seal" (vv.12-17)

Taking into account that the message is embedded in symbols – we endeavor to remain consistent in our exegesis. We may not indiscriminately decide what is symbolic and what isn't. If the sword out of Jesus mouth isn't literal but symbolic, and the beast from the sea isn't literal but symbolic, and the four horsemen aren't

⁵⁷³ Smith, *The Six Seals*, Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Smith, *The Six Seals*, Ibid.

literal, but symbolic, it would be inconsistent and untrue to the passage to decide this description is literal and not symbolic. “It is important to note that in Scripture there are formula statements or phrases employed to convey critical information pictorially”⁵⁷⁵.

John sees the whole universe caving in, the very earth on which men stage their rebellion against God, is caving in underneath them. The picture is not a literal description of what happens but a pictorial message of God avenging the blood of the saints. “If they are to be taken literally, there is no room for any more apocalypse, or any more history; the physical structure of the universe is at an end”⁵⁷⁶.

The persecuted martyrs are saying: “Lord how long before justice is done and your Church is vindicated?” and then God answers with judgment. It is not the final Day of Wrath. That awaits the 7th seal.

There is a wrath that comes into the world of man every so often. There is a real sense in which this sixth seal has happened in many places down through history, when the whole world bemoans the fact that their whole world has caved in⁵⁷⁷. Although there is a final judgment, there are also judgments through time bringing worlds to an end. It is stylized language meaning—a coming upheaval and destruction. They could no doubt occur in the natural realm prior to the second coming, but are more likely spiritual happenings made known through heavy symbolism⁵⁷⁸.

Seven conditions of life are named, covering the whole fabric of society from the Emperor down to the lowest slave. For οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, the heads of states hostile to the Christ, see Psalm. 2:2 ff., Acts 4:26 ff.; the Caesars are in view here, but

⁵⁷⁵ Bass, p.190

⁵⁷⁶ Bass, p.189

⁵⁷⁷ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁷⁸ Fogle, p.176

not exclusively; included are the other persons in authority named the *μεγιστᾶνες* (*magistratus*) are the civil officials (e.g. the persecuting proconsuls), while the *χιλίαρχοι* (*tribuni*) are the military authorities; the former word is frequently coupled with *βασιλεῖς* (Jonah 3:7, Isaiah 34:12, Jeremiah 25:18 (49:38), 32:5 (25:19), Daniel 5:2 f.); *χιλίαρχος* (e.g., Acts 21:31 ff., 22:24 ff., 23:10 ff., 24:22) usually represents the Roman *tribunus militum*. Not only officials will be terror-struck by the signs of God's wrath, but all classes of society; wealth and physical strength will afford no security; slaves and free—the contrast indicates the deepest of class-distinctions in ancient life—will be huddled together in the frantic attempt to escape⁵⁷⁹. The inclusive list of classes also reveals that God is no respecter of persons but judges all on an equal basis regardless of their social, political, or economic standing⁵⁸⁰.

We are not accustomed to couple the thought of wrath, or indignation, with the *Lamb*, which has ever been the accepted symbol of gentleness. But there is a terrible truth involved in it nevertheless. For if the grace of the Lamb of God be rejected, His indignation and wrath must be faced. It cannot be otherwise. It is part of eternal righteousness so to do. God Himself will not, and in accordance with the holiness of His nature cannot, have it otherwise⁵⁸¹. The martyrs cried, “Avenge us!” but the unbelievers on earth will cry, “Hide us!”⁵⁸².

(g) “Do not harm till we have sealed” (7:2-3)

There is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals – a pause between God's judgment of the persecutors and the Day of Wrath marking the end.

⁵⁷⁹ Swete, p.92

⁵⁸⁰ Beale, p.400

⁵⁸¹ Ironside, p.120

⁵⁸² Wiersbe, op.cit.

The Church in the middle of all this is receiving the seal of the Living God. There is a holding back of God's judgment. The Church will be protected. It is the idea that God's judgment is held back for the sake of the Church. Smith remarks: "You would be surprised at what judgments do not come because of the presence of the Church. I am impressed with God's mercy in the holding back..."⁵⁸³.

The purpose of the present pair of visions (1–8, 9–17) is to contrast the preparedness of the Church for the coming end with the panic of the unprepared world (6:15 ff.)⁵⁸⁴. The blowing of the winds (7:1) suggests the judgment of God. His judgments are often thought of as great storms. But these storms of judgment blow only at His commands⁵⁸⁵. God's love is such, that He *cannot do anything* in the way of judgment, till His people are secured from hurt (Genesis 19:22)⁵⁸⁶.

Beale comments: Why God "seals" his servants is debated. The main alternatives are: (1) for protection from physical harm, (2) for protection from demons, and (3) for protection from losing their faith and hence their salvation. Ezekiel 9 is often correctly proposed as the best background for the divine sealing. There God commands an angel to put a mark on all genuine believers but instructs other angels to slay unfaithful Israelites. The mark on believers is to protect them from the coming wrath, which will be inflicted by the Babylonians and which unfaithful Israelites will suffer⁵⁸⁷. The angel with "the seal of the living God" (7:2) cries to the four angels with "a loud voice" (indicating that he speaks by God's authority) not to start the awful proceedings until He has completed His work⁵⁸⁸.

⁵⁸³ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁸⁴ Swete, p.93

⁵⁸⁵ Bass, p.200

⁵⁸⁶ Jamieson, op.cit.

⁵⁸⁷ Beale, p.409

⁵⁸⁸ Fogle, pp.178-80

Another reason for the sealing of the saints is to *identify* God's people so that the wrath of God will not affect them. Satan's seal identifies his people, who are the object of God's wrath. In Revelation "tribulation" is always unbelievers persecuting believers, while wrath/anger is always God's judgment on unbelievers so that they might repent and turn to faith in Christ. This positive purpose of judgment can be seen in Deuteronomy 27–28⁵⁸⁹. A seal may have been an ancient way of showing (1) truth (cf. John 3:33); (2) ownership (cf. John 6:27; 2Timothy 2:19; Revelation 7:2–3); (3) security or protection (cf. Genesis 4:15; Matthew 27:66; Romans 15:28; 2Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30); (4) it may also simply be a sign or symbol of something (cf. Romans 4:11 and 1Corinthians 9:2)⁵⁹⁰. The seal of the living God is not the same as the seals used to close up the scroll in chapters 5 and 6. The seal referred to here is an instrument that marks or stamps a figure, symbol, number, or name upon an object or person. Kings and other important people had such seals, sometimes attached to a ring, called "a signet ring" (see Gen 41:42; Est 3:10; Dan 6:17). The normal purpose of the seal was to identify a document as authentic; the kind of seal spoken of in 5:1 and 20:3 was used to prevent the thing sealed from being opened (see Matt 27:66, the sealing of Jesus' tomb). In this case the seal is a mark that shows that those who have it on their foreheads are God's people⁵⁹¹.

The sealing of the saints is "almost certainly symbolic, for the ancient world did not know the practice of stamping the foreheads of individuals with a seal. Whether literal or not, it contrasts with the famous mark of the beast of Revelation 13:16"⁵⁹². This verifies our view of chapter 6 that none of the events described there are in fact final end-time judgments. This is consistent with the teaching of Scripture

⁵⁸⁹ Utley, p.64

⁵⁹⁰ Utley, Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Bratcher, p.123

⁵⁹² Easley, p.125

as a whole: God's people go through the trials caused by "the world, the flesh, and the devil" (thus there are many martyrs), but they are spared the experience of God's wrath because of Christ.⁵⁹³

(h) "One hundred and forty-four thousand" (v.4)

Just as with the interpretation of the 24 elders around God's Throne, we understand that numbers are symbols, messages, not a literal numeric value. John *heard* the number, he didn't *see* the number.

Utley gives four reasons why the number in this passage is symbolic. (1) The number itself is a round number and all the tribes have an equal number; (2) the number is a multiple of twelve which is the biblical number of organization (or possibly the people of God) and ten, which is the biblical number of completion; (3) chapter 7 is in apocalyptic language; and (4) the list of the tribes of Israel is slightly altered (Dan is omitted, and Ephraim is replaced by Joseph) so a Jew would know that it was not meant to be taken literally⁵⁹⁴.

The number 144 000 most certainly reminds us of the 12's of the Old and New Testaments. 12 being the representative of the Old Testament and 12 being the representative of the New Testament, hence 24 elders around the Throne as symbol of the entire Church spanning both Testaments. There is some speculation as to the exact breakdown, but most commentators are unanimous as to its meaning.

Smith explains the number as a breakdown of $12 \times 12 = 144$ and $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 144\,000$. 10 is the perfect number. We count from 1-10 and then start all over (decimal system). 10 represents completion x3 meaning completeness, completeness, completeness which is the number of God. 144000 represents an idea,

⁵⁹³ Easley, Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Utley, op.cit.

not a number. “The idea is of the perfect completed Church of the Old Testament and New Testament”⁵⁹⁵.

Sloan explains: “The number 144,000 is an intensification ($12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10$ $\times 10$) of the original number twelve (itself an obvious allusion to the twelve tribes). This indicates that the 144,000 comprise the full number of God’s people, God’s people now being all (Jew or Gentile) who are followers of Jesus⁵⁹⁶.

Brown uses a slightly different breakdown, but comes to the same conclusion: “That is, $12 \times 12 \times 1000$. The number 12 is the symbol of perfection, especially in the physical and human world”⁵⁹⁷.

Beale comments: “Many commentators rightly understand the number to be figurative, since nearly all other numbers in the book have figurative significance. Here, the group who is sealed represents the complete number of God’s people”⁵⁹⁸. He explains the breakdown thus: “144,000 is the result of the square of twelve multiplied by one thousand, or the multiple of the squares of ten and twelve multiplied by ten. The use of twelve (and perhaps ten) heightens the figurative idea of completeness. The square of twelve may be merely the number of the tribes of Israel multiplied by itself or, more likely, the twelve tribes multiplied by the twelve apostles. Chapter 21 confirms this suggestion, where the names of the twelve tribes and of the twelve apostles form part of the figurative structure of the heavenly city of God, “the new Jerusalem.” This city represents the whole people of God (21:9–10) in whose midst God and the Lamb dwell (21:12–22:5). The new Jerusalem has twelve gates, which are twelve pearls, on which are written the names of the twelve tribes. The city also has a wall one hundred and forty-four cubits in height with twelve foundation

⁵⁹⁵ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

⁵⁹⁶ Sloan, pp.672-73

⁵⁹⁷ Brown, op.cit.

⁵⁹⁸ Beale, pp.416-17

stones on which are written the names of the twelve apostles (cf. also the similar figurative use of “twelve” twice in 22:2)⁵⁹⁹.

Bass agrees with its meaning: “It refers to a perfect Israel fully present, God having lost none”⁶⁰⁰, and so does Yeatts: “The best interpretation of the 144,000 is that they symbolically represent the Christian church”⁶⁰¹. Elwell also agrees: “The number 144,000 represents completeness... John is saying that all of those who are marked by God are those whom God will save. Their number is complete and all of them will be protected until the end”⁶⁰².

The New Testament teaches that we become servants of God when we submit ourselves to the new life of the Spirit. Jesus said to the disciples, “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord ... shall find watching” (Luke 12:37). We are the servants of Christ, called to serve in love and humility. We are the ones who have been sealed by God as illustrated in Revelation 7.

The Scriptures say, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2Corinthians 1:21–22). If we are in Christ, God has sealed us by the Holy Spirit, the very sealing process described in our text. Paul told the Ephesians the same thing, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13), and “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). Every member of the universal Church who is born again is sealed by the Holy Spirit. Revelation is not

⁵⁹⁹ Beale, op.cit.

⁶⁰⁰ Bass, p.204

⁶⁰¹ Yeatts, p.142

⁶⁰² Elwell, op.cit.

referring only to a select band of Jewish people in the End Times who will be sealed⁶⁰³.

(i) “The tribes of the children of Israel” (vv.5-8)

The list of twelve tribes is irregular and incomplete. This is important as to its meaning. Firstly, the list actually names eleven *sons* of Jacob and one *grandson*, Manasseh (5:6). Secondly, this is the only tribal list of the Bible in which Judah comes first. Most often Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn is first. The sons are not listed in birth order, according to their mother, or according to the traditional geography of the tribal allotment in the land of Israel. Thirdly, the tribe of Dan is completely missing. Fourthly, for the exact same number from each tribe to be chosen 12,000 is without parallel. The original tribes varied greatly in number. Why they should exactly number the same here has never been satisfactorily explained⁶⁰⁴. Also, two of Jacob’s sons, Levi and Joseph, do not have tribes named after them, but here they are listed as tribes⁶⁰⁵.

The Apocalyptic order starts with the tribe from which Christ came (cf. 5:5); and then proceeds to the tribe of the firstborn son of Jacob, which heads most of the Old Testament lists; next come the tribes located in the North, broken by the mention of Simeon and Levi who in other lists usually follow Reuben or Judah, while Joseph and Benjamin bring up the rear. This arrangement seems to have been suggested partly by the birth-order of the patriarchs and partly by the geographical situation of the tribes; Christian associations have probably determined the place of Judah and of the Galilean tribes⁶⁰⁶.

⁶⁰³ Fogle, pp.180-81

⁶⁰⁴ Easley, p.126

⁶⁰⁵ Bratcher, p.125

⁶⁰⁶ Swete, p.96

The priority of Judah here emphasizes the precedence of the messianic king from the tribe of Judah (cf. Genesis 49:10; 1Chronicles 5:1–2) and thus refers to a fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis 49:8 that the eleven other tribes “will bow down to” Judah⁶⁰⁷.

This is a company of people – the True Israel and their first-born is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The term “Israel” is important. Israel means “one who is conquered by God”. You can call yourself an Israelite but if you are not conquered by God you are no Israelite. So here is a company of those who are conquered by God and their Lord is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah⁶⁰⁸.

Although commentators are very reluctant to speculate as to the meaning of the unique list of tribes mentioned in the passage, Smith offers an interpretation that is not altogether inconsistent with the message of the first 8 chapters thus far.

The second name is Reuben. The name Reuben means “Behold a Son”.

The third one is called Gad. Gad means “a great company” and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (according to Hebrews) is bringing a great company, many sons to glory.

Asher is the fourth tribe, and Asher means “Happy” or “Joy filled”. This great company under the leadership of the Lion are filled with unspeakable joy.

The fifth tribe is Nephthalon – “to wrestle and overcome”. One of the key words of Revelation is “Those who overcome”. The Church are the ultimate Overcomers. The Church is the Company that also overcomes the beast and the dragon and every false thing that is on the face of the earth.

⁶⁰⁷ Beale, p.417

⁶⁰⁸ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

The sixth tribe is Manasseh that means “forgetting”. Joseph gave that name to his son. Joseph was sold as a slave, was held prisoner for crimes he didn’t commit, was discovered by Pharaoh, and made prime minister. When he married he called his first-born Manasseh as if to say: “finally I have forgotten all my troubles and I have forgotten all the ill that was done to me”.

The seventh tribe is Simeon. Simeon means “hearing”. This is a company whose ears are open. “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10). They are a company of people who listen and hear. These words are another key in the book of Revelation: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”.

The eighth name is Levi. Levi means “joined”. This is a company of people that is joined to the Lord, one Spirit. We are joined to God in Spirit.

The ninth tribe mentioned is Issachar. Issachar means “A price was paid”. It is a company which has been redeemed with a price. Every member of this clan is sealed with the blood of Jesus.

The tenth tribe is Zebulon which means “a dwelling-place”. This company is the dwelling place of God. Ephesians 2:20 says that we have become the habitation of God through the Spirit.

The eleventh tribe mentioned is Joseph. Joseph means “Add, fruitful”. So this company of people who have the Spirit of God added to them and have become fruitful, and produced the fruits of the Spirit. Incidentally, when Joseph was given his blessing, his father played on his name, and said he would become so fruitful that the boughs or branches of his tree would hang over his neighbour’s wall. Joseph is the one that reminds us that not only are we the expressers of the fruits of the Spirit, but also that we gentiles are included in this Israel. We are the ones where God went over the wall.

The twelfth tribe is Benjamin. The name Benjamin is very important – he was the son of Rachel. Rachel was dear to the heart of Jacob and he wanted her to have children, and she had Joseph and then she had no more until she had Benjamin – giving birth to Benjamin she died, and as she was dying, she took the little child, and because of the horror and agony of her death, she named him “Ben-oni” meaning “Son of my deep sorrow”. Jacob changed his name to Benjamin which means “Son of my right hand”. The Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect Benoni-Benjamin. He is the Son of my sorrow, and after the sorrow was over He arose again and became the Son of his Father’s right hand⁶⁰⁹.

(j) “A great multitude” (vv.9-17)

The last passage in chapter seven is a reminder of Isaiah 49:10-13. It has a current working in whatever circumstances one is in, but it has the hope of complete fulfillment in the future. Isaiah writes:

They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them. I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated. Surely these shall come from afar; “Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.” Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted.

The words “He will lead them” in v.10 carries the connotation of “gently, softly leading them so as to comfort them”. We see this in chapter 40:11 where Isaiah writes: “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young”.

⁶⁰⁹ Smith, *The Six Seals*, op.cit.

We can experience this comfort of Christ in our midst today, but the true and complete fulfillment is around the Throne with all our brothers and sisters who have bowed their knees before the Lamb (and most often were persecuted for that). There is deep, genuine comfort in the arms of the Lamb. This makes one echo the words in Revelation 22:17: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely”.

The entire company of God’s redeemed from all peoples and nations since time began, worship and praise God singing: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen” (v.12).

How glorious the reign of Christ and how thorough the comfort of the Father!

8. Meaning of the vision

What happens when the Lamb reigns? This vision is a blessing to everyone who is under the reign of Christ.

- (a) Christ is crowned the undisputed King of the universe. No one is like Him and He is exalted above every rank, power, principality and authority. Christ is exalted above Caesar, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi, Kim Il-Sung, Satan or any other power or authority known to man.
- (b) Christ’s gospel conquers the heart of man to give everlasting life and love.
- (c) There are dark and powerful forces opposed to Christ’s rule who wouldn’t hesitate to destroy those submitting to Christ. In fact,

everyone associating with Christ and His rule will be tormented by those who refuse to do so.

(d) The redeemed are not excluded from the sorrow of this world.

Although they are not of this world, they are still in it and will often suffer its brokenness like everybody else.

(e) It is not un-Christlike to ask God's intervention in the pain and suffering of this world. "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The secret of the question is in its content. Those inquiring from God do not doubt that He is in control. It is because they *know* He is in control that they ask the question. The question is also not "Why do You allow this to happen?", but rather "When are you going to pour your judgment out – as we know it is going to happen?". The words "holy and true" reveal this very clearly. God is not the cause of the torture and pain, but the judge thereof. God will punish injustice. God would not be just, nor the Lord of history, if He did not punish injustice.

(f) Persecutors can only kill or maim the body, but they cannot rob the redeemed of their eternal lives. The Lamb's redeemed cannot be destroyed. They might be killed, but not destroyed.

(g) When God does act He will violently shake the persecutors' very existence. David writes in Psalm 18:6-8:

In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from His temple,
And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears.
Then the earth shook and trembled;

The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken,
Because He was angry.
Smoke went up from His nostrils,
And devouring fire from His mouth;
Coals were kindled by it.

He adds (vv.13-14):

The LORD thundered from heaven,
And the Most High uttered His voice,
Hailstones and coals of fire.
He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe,
Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them.

(h) The company of the Lamb's redeemed are truly and thoroughly comforted and restored. One could describe it as the ultimate fulfillment of Joel 2:25-26:

“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust...
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the LORD your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
And My people shall never be put to shame”.

(i) God will put an end to all suffering once and for all.

The Lamb is on the Throne and this life is not everything. The Lamb rules even if the persecution means losing one's job, being raped or shot to death. Does this mean Christ lost control? No, by no means. Why does He permit such cruelty then? Wrong question. It should rather be "Why does man stoop to such evil?". The wicked manifest the evil to which they adhere and the Lamb will judge and punish them.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Revelation 1-7 forms the basis of our counseling model to the severely persecuted. Its message is the nucleus of the book of Revelation. Chapters 8-22 expand in a powerful way on the first seven chapters. However, the additions of these three passages from these chapters are to support this study. They are 11:1-14; 13:11-18; and summary notes on the last chapter (21-22).

9. The temple and the witnesses (11:1-14)

(a) Measuring the temple (11:1-2)

There are two Greek words translated in English merely as "temple". The first word (ἱερόν) meaning "temple" is used in (John 2:14ff) and describes the whole temple precinct with its buildings, courts, etc.⁶¹⁰. The second word (ναός), also means "temple" and is used in Revelation 11:1ff to particularly describe a "place or structure specifically associated with or set apart for a deity, who is frequently perceived to be using it as a dwelling"⁶¹¹. In terms of the temple in Jerusalem this refers to the Holy and the Most Holy.

⁶¹⁰ Arndt, p.470

⁶¹¹ Arndt, p.665

John is given instruction to measure only the ναός and ignore the “the court which is outside the temple” or, in other words, the ἱερόν. This has special significance.

(i) Temple

When John is instructed to measure only the ναός he is instructed to measure only the dwelling of God, i.e. the Church. The Seer has in view not the material Sanctuary, but the spiritual building of the Church⁶¹². The two distinctions signify worldly religion (trampled by the Gentiles) vs. the true Church of God. In the ἱερόν the world has invaded bringing with it its systems and defilements. God has allowed this. The ναός is where God dwells. The one contains all the sounds of religion but is devoid of the presence of God. The other is God’s property and contains the glory of God.

The ναός contains the golden Altar of Incense which is the prayer of the saints and the Ark of Covenant. The true worshippers of the Lamb are all there.

(ii) Measure

The act of measuring is an act of defining property. The angel instructs John not only to measure the ναός, but to ignore the ἱερόν. God has drawn a boundary allowing the world to invade the outer courts but also prohibiting the world invading the true Church of God. Paul writes: “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity’” (2Timothy 2:19). The Lord’s property is measured, i.e. He knows what is His. “Let everyone who names the name

⁶¹² Swete, p.130

of Christ depart from iniquity” is a clear indication of the difference between the *ναός* and the *ἱερόν* invaded by the world.

The Church is not as big as it looks. The temple looked very big. God said the world can have it. There are many who are called by the Name of God but they are not of God. The world cannot touch the *ναός* – it is God’s. In other words if you want to find the *ναός* find the people who worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

(iii) The Gentiles trample

The scene of the Gentiles trampling the outer courts is a very important theme in Revelation. The Church has two enemies: the world and its systems, and false religion. There is the Lamb who roars like a lion and the lamb who speaks like a dragon (13:11-18). If believers can’t be dominated by the worldly systems, Satan will try to swamp them with false religion. However, they will not be swamped! It doesn’t matter how the true Church is surrounded by the false church, it cannot, ever, be swamped.

We have already seen that the true Jew, or chosen person of God, is one who is circumcised in the heart, a spiritual or inward Jew (chapter 4; cf. Romans 2:28–29). All others are “Gentiles,” a term synonymous with the unrighteous of the world. They are outside the temple, in the outer courts of God’s presence. They “*tread under foot*” the “*holy city*.” They mock and scorn all that is spiritual and they who have drawn close to God; i.e., the real Church of Jesus Christ⁶¹³.

(iv) Forty two months

⁶¹³ Fogle, p.210

This, again, is numerical symbolism. If the number 7 donates perfection, then half of that donates imperfection or something temporary. In this case it means “only a little while”. Forty two months is three and a half years, i.e. half of seven. The same meaning is derived from other time symbolisms such as 1260 days (v.3) or three and a half days (11:11). The false church will not last forever. Religious systems will be only temporary, but God’s Church will be forever.

(b) The witnesses (11:2-14)

It is important again to note that we are dealing with symbols and meanings, not two literal witnesses.

(i) Their identity

The witnesses represent the Church in her function of witness-bearing (Acts 1:8), and her testimony is symbolized by two witnesses⁶¹⁴. They represent the whole community of faith, whose primary function is to be a prophetic witness⁶¹⁵. As far back as Deuteronomy 17:6 it is noted that no testimony is a valid testimony unless confirmed by at least two witnesses. Jesus quotes from this passage when He said: “...by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matthew 18:16). In 1Timothy 5:19 Paul instructs Timothy not to accept an accusation against an elder except from at least two witnesses.

Two witnesses is a shorthand symbol for saying “a perfect and complete testimony to truth”. The Church is not only a worshipping community. The Church is also the perfect witness of God’s truth on the streets of this world. You can’t touch the worshipping community, but you can touch its public witness. That is why the two

⁶¹⁴ Swete, p.132

⁶¹⁵ Beale, p.573

witnesses are killed⁶¹⁶. The sanctuary in North Korea today is as strong as it has ever been, but they have been highly efficient in killing the two witnesses. The public testimony of the Church in North Korea is silenced, but the Church isn't.

The witnesses in Revelation prophesied, i.e. they spoke on behalf of God. Brand defines prophecy as the "reception and declaration of a word from the Lord through a direct prompting of the Holy Spirit and the human instrument thereof"⁶¹⁷.

They wore sackcloth which is a sign of repentance. The Church stands before the world in repentance, speaking the words of God (the gospel). The world, on the other hand, is very unrepentant. The Church torments the world. How? Paul writes: "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life" (2Corinthians 2:15-16). A Church whose very lifestyle says it has repented of sin, and who now speak forth on behalf of God, torments men. Men are tormented by truth and they are tormented by lies, and still they will not repent. It says fire came out of their mouth. The word of God is like a fire which consumes the enemy. That is an idea which runs through the Old Testament⁶¹⁸.

Elijah stood in the midst of a very unrepentant world and he came forth on behalf of God. He was able to prove his words by works. Likewise the Church stands in a similar world with power and can prove what it says. The Church, the whole Church, is an Elijah.

The two witnesses turned water into blood. Who did that? Moses. Moses stood in the presence of Pharaoh bearing the testimony to truth in the middle of lies. God vindicated Moses' testimony. Even so the Church stands as the perfect testimony to

⁶¹⁶ Smith, *The Seven Trumpets*, [Online Available]

⁶¹⁷ Brand, p.1333

⁶¹⁸ Smith, *The Seven Trumpets*, op.cit.

truth, in the middle of a world that is set against God and God vindicates the Church's testimony.

The Church in all its power and witness is a Church that lives by God's principle of "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts". It is a Church who can face the mountain and say: "Who are you, o great mountain" for they are unified with the Ruler of the universe. The Church is able to stand in the middle of the world and speak with power because it is receiving the oil of the Holy Spirit. It is helpless in itself and totally dependent upon the Lord.

(ii) Their death

The measured Sanctuary remains in its midst, an impregnable fortress, but the Witnesses go out into the street where the power of the Beast is supreme, and there, after a while, they meet their fate⁶¹⁹. The souls of the witnesses cannot be harmed because they are protected by the invisible sanctuary within which they dwell. "If anyone wishes to harm them" because of their prophetic witness, then such people themselves will be harmed by the witnesses. God's assured presence among his people guarantees that they will not be harmed in any ultimate, eternal sense⁶²⁰.

Who is the beast? The beast is world power. The dragon is Satan. These two work together. The beast puts the two witnesses to death. The beast cannot destroy the Church, but it can silence its witness. Severely persecuted believers know all about this.

When the two witnesses were killed the people rejoiced because their witness of repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ tormented their lust for darkness. The words depict the hatred for Christians entertained by the pagan majority, and the joy

⁶¹⁹ Swete, p.135

⁶²⁰ Beale, p.579

with which the edicts against them were received⁶²¹. Jesus said: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19-20).

The corpses of the witnesses lay in the streets for three and a half days. Again we find numerical symbolism denoting imperfection or a temporary state. The message is clear: the witnesses will be silenced for only a little while. After that God will raise them up!

(iii) Their resurrection

His witnesses rise and ascend in full view of their enemies; their triumph is celebrated openly⁶²².

We have often seen how the Church’s witness is silenced in the world only to return with greater strength and volume. In many countries where believers were severely persecuted to the point of extinguishing the Church’s witness God judged the system and raised the Church’s witness from the grave. We shall see it again and again.

(c) Meaning of the vision

Apart from what we have already said above there is the additional question of “wisdom” when it comes to witnessing about Christ. Should I testify about Christ even if I know it is going to get me killed?

There is a time when the Church’s witness is killed by the systems and powers of this world, but that does not mean that all the believers are killed. If there are

⁶²¹ Swete, p.136

⁶²² Swete, p.137

believers then, why are they not testifying? Are they not denying Christ through their silence? Are they not faltering in their calling?

We will deal with these issues in the final chapter, but here we shall only note the fact that there is a point where the Church's witness is silenced. This by no means implies treachery or denying Christ. However, it is also important to notice that the silence is only temporary and that God Himself will revive the Church's witness.

10. The lamb-dragon (13:11-18)

(a) His lords

The beast from the land has two partners or, more appropriately, lords. These three are often referred to as the Satanic trinity.

Revelation describes the dragon as Satan whose ultimate purpose is to destroy the Church (chapter 12).

The beast from the sea (13:1-9) describes the systems of this world – world powers opposed to the rule of Christ⁶²³. The systems have always been there, they are here now, and they will always be there until Christ returns. The beast from the sea is empowered by the dragon and the sentiments and character of the dragon are transferred to the beast from the sea. It is a fierce beast who blatantly blasphemes God and murders the saints. However, the beast from the sea will perish from the way it lives. Believers are called to faithfully wait it out (v.9).

(b) His identity

⁶²³ Davis, p.270

The second beast is probably, like the first, a system rather than a person⁶²⁴. The fact that he had two horns (13:11) and not ten indicates his subordinate relationship to the first beast. A horn is representative of power. The first beast had great power, the second only a limited amount⁶²⁵. The authority of the Dragon, which was delegated to the first beast (13:2), descends to the second; the first fights the Dragon's battles, the second supports the first by methods of his own, but with a strength which is derived ultimately from the Dragon⁶²⁶. The second beast is explicitly said to be aligned with the first beast, further confirming its identification with the state. He exercises the authority of the first beast. This is emphasized by saying that he exercises this authority "in the presence" of the first beast⁶²⁷.

His appearance suggested innocence and even weakness, his voice was the roar of a dragon⁶²⁸. Unlike the leopard, bear and lion of the first beast, the lamb disarms his audience.⁶²⁹

Why are the two beasts described with so many traits borrowed from the acts of Old Testament prophets and God and from descriptions of God, the Lamb, and Christians elsewhere in the Apocalypse? The reason is that the beasts attempt to validate their divine authority in a manner similar to that of true prophets⁶³⁰. The beast has primarily a religious role^{631 632}. Though the beast professes to represent the truth and appears harmless as a lamb, his inner Satanic nature is revealed through his speaking with the authority of the dragon, reflecting the alluring, deceptive speech of Satan, the

⁶²⁴ Swete, p.169

⁶²⁵ Bass, p.310

⁶²⁶ Swete, p.166

⁶²⁷ Beale, p.708

⁶²⁸ Swete, op.cit.

⁶²⁹ Bass, op.cit.

⁶³⁰ Beale, p.710

⁶³¹ Beale, p.707

⁶³² Bass, p.311

dragon, that led to the sin of Adam and Eve⁶³³. The second beast is in some sense at once a Pseudochrist and an Antichrist⁶³⁴. The true prophet lives in the presence of God, taking his orders from Him and doing His pleasure; the false prophet stands before the beast, whose interpreter and servant he is⁶³⁵. The accent is not on “war against the saints” (as in v. 7), but on the deception and subjection of the general public⁶³⁶. Paul writes:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Swete explains the second beast according to its application during 95 AD. “The success of the [second beast] is due to the signs (διὰ τὰ σημεῖα) which he is empowered to work (vv. 13, 15). These are done ‘before the Beast’ (v. 12, note), i.e. in the presence and with the approval of the Imperial officers. It is hardly possible to misunderstand the Apocalypticist’s meaning. The Caesar-worship was a state function at which the proconsul and the other magistrates assisted, and the pagan priesthood wrought their σημεῖα before these representatives of the Empire; their jugglery addressed itself to persons in authority and not only to the ignorant populace”⁶³⁷.

Throughout the existence of the kingdoms of the first beast, many people of the world have been persuaded to worship their country and its political action. To

⁶³³ Beale, p.708

⁶³⁴ Swete, op.cit.

⁶³⁵ Swete, Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Michaels, op.cit.

⁶³⁷ Swete, p.167

esteem a political nation above the Lord God is to worship the same. That is what this second beast is doing. He is causing people to take their eyes off the Lord and focus them on worldly affairs, particularly in the realms of trade, finance and general commercial endeavors. He easily accomplishes this with many because of their love of money and other material wealth⁶³⁸.

When purported Christian teachers take their primary cues from the surrounding culture instead of from God's word, they corrupt the covenant community spiritually by encouraging it to live by norms and a faith that ultimately oppose the reign of God and Christ⁶³⁹. If you submit to the dragon even if he is dressed like a sheep, he will take you to dragon-fold, not sheepfold. You might say, "Well, I am filled with the Spirit". That was what this book was written for; to tell Spirit-filled people to beware of who they are following⁶⁴⁰.

(c) The mark of the beast

χάραγμα means a mark that is engraved, etched, branded, cut, imprinted⁶⁴¹. As the servants of God receive on their foreheads (7:3) the impress of the Divine Seal, so the servants of the beast are marked with the 'stamp' of the beast⁶⁴². The point to note here is that a person is identified as a servant of another by means of marks associated with his or her body⁶⁴³. If branding of slaves is in consideration here, then the beast's worshipers are seen as his property. If branding of soldiers or of religious devotees is in view, the worshipers are seen as his faithful followers⁶⁴⁴.

⁶³⁸ Fogle, p.245

⁶³⁹ Beale, pp.709-10

⁶⁴⁰ Smith, *The Woman and the Beast*, [Online Available]

⁶⁴¹ Arndt, p.1077

⁶⁴² Swete, pp.170-71

⁶⁴³ Bass, p.315

⁶⁴⁴ Beale, p.715

A more cautious approach starts from the simple recognition that 666 is linked to the characteristic interest in the number seven throughout the book of Revelation as a number of completeness or perfection. The number 666 falls short of the magic seven three times over—at the level of hundreds, tens and single units. William Hendriksen defined its message as “failure upon failure upon failure.” The point is subtly different from the dividing of seven in half to yield three and a half years, the equivalent of the “42 months” or “1260 days.” These numbers, as we have seen, represented a divine limitation on the authority of the dragon or the beast, while the number 666 attempts to characterize the beast himself. The most important thing for the modern reader to remember in connection with the celebrated 666 of verse 18 is that its purpose is to characterize, not identify, the beast. I⁶⁴⁵

The “forehead” represents ideological commitment and the “hand” the practical outworking of that commitment. Likewise, as a travesty of the signs of membership in the Old Testament community of faith, the beast’s marks on the foreheads and hands of his worshipers refer to their loyal, consistent, and wholehearted commitment to him⁶⁴⁶.

The mark of the beast relates to the purchase of food, and possibly employment. God’s people are not protected from this economic privation⁶⁴⁷. Here citizens who do not bear this mark are not prevented from entering the markets, but if they enter, none will buy their goods or sell them the necessities of life. Such a “boycotting” of Christians might result partly from the unpopularity of their faith, partly from a dread of offending the dominant priesthood or their Roman supporters⁶⁴⁸.

⁶⁴⁵ Michaels, op.cit.

⁶⁴⁶ Beale, p.717

⁶⁴⁷ Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, p.98

⁶⁴⁸ Swete, p.171

We have repented of the dragon, we have repented of the beast and we have repented of the lamb that is not a lamb. We gave ourselves away to the Lamb as it had been slain, and that meant persecution. That is what is happening here. Why? Because you refuse to bow to the beast, and you refuse to bow to the lamb that was a dragon, so you are going to be persecuted for it⁶⁴⁹.

(d) Meaning of the vision

Two words that are important for understanding the practical meaning of this vision are “perseverance” and “wisdom”. The first beast will persecute the Church. Believers are called to perseverance; to endure the persecution. That speaks for itself. If you face the world governments, you need patience.

However, when Scripture speaks of the lamb-dragon it speaks of wisdom. Believers are not called to patience where the false church and pseudo-Christ worship are concerned. Wisdom is required to identify them and flee from them.

11. Summary notes (21-22)

(a) The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)

It is most important to note here that John receives an invitation to come and see “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (v.9). The emphasis is not on a place, building, or geographical location, but on *someone*. This is a continuation of the typical symbolic characteristic of Revelation. The New Jerusalem is not “heaven”.

What John sees is a description of the Church of Christ engulfed in the glory and presence of God. It forms a perfect cube resembling the ναός or dwelling place of God.

⁶⁴⁹ Smith, *The Woman and the Beast*, op.cit.

There is no temple in it for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (v.22). The whole city is the dwelling place, or tabernacle, of God. Paul writes: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1Corinthians 3:16-17). The city radiates with the light of the Lamb (v.23). The nations recognition of Christ is the glory of this city. To be part of this city one has to be part of the Lamb’s book of life (v.27).

There is no indication that this New Jerusalem is the Church in heaven or the Church after the Second Coming. It is the Church of Christ already – God’s property; God’s dwelling place. It is measured, protected and separated. Nobody can ever touch it. It is filled with the glory of God. Worldly powers and forces of darkness can come close to the temple of God; but they cannot touch it, no matter what they do.

God has made Himself personally responsible for us. Jesus is the Great Shepherd who is personally responsible for keeping His Church. We watch and we pray, but when all is said and done He does the keeping and we do not drift out and suddenly find ourselves outside. We do not happen to be strolling for a morning walk on the walls and fall off. It is not that easy to fall out of God. The walls are walls of separation as well as walls of safety. There is a Grand Canyon between the Church and the world⁶⁵⁰.

In this city is a river of pure, living water as well flowing from the Throne of God (22:1). Water in Revelation symbolizes that on which the soul feeds – teachings and philosophies either of man and the devil, or in this case, pure, healing truth from God. The water of God brings nourishment and healing to everyone who drinks from

⁶⁵⁰ Smith, Malcolm, *The New Jerusalem II*, [Online Available]

it (v.2). Jesus said: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). The Tree of Life is none other than Christ Himself ministering to our souls.

V.5 imparts the timelessness of this perfect habitation of God. It is already God’s city and it will be forever God’s city. The author of Hebrews writes: 12:18-19, 22-24

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

This was written to persecuted Christians. This message is particularly for believers who are being persecuted, when the congregation is being split and torn in pieces, when the world seems to have trampled all over the outer court and we seem to say: “Where do we go from here?”

The Architect says: “Come and see the original plan – blessed is he who reads this book and who hears it. Whether you are being attacked by political power or by apostate religion, lured by the sweet, sweet smell of the world and her scent, or whether you are being disrupted within by false prophets – take a look at the original plan!”⁶⁵¹.

⁶⁵¹ Smith, Malcolm, *The New Jerusalem II*, [Online Available]

Things are not what they seem to be. If we see what God sees, then we will soar above all the despair of this world and will rest in God. We will be blessed as the book promised – that is supremely, enviably joyful.

(b) Christ's imminent return (vv.6-21)

All through the book you get one expression, “Behold I come quickly”. Often people have a problem with this. How quickly is quickly?

This book is founded on the fact that Jesus Christ is Victor. He has conquered and it is done. Everything is sealed and signed, it is over and done with. Jesus words were not: “Next week I might come”. That was not the point. The point is this: the Grand Finale, in comparison with all that we have waited for, is soon. The word “soon” is ambiguous, and it is meant to be ambiguous. Anyone who sets a time, begins to talk about when the end will come. God didn't say he would come on such and such a date. He said: “Soon”. In the light of the finished work of Jesus it is soon. The details are none of our business. It is soon. We look back and see “it is done” and we know that whatever is happening now, it will be completed soon.

Chapter Seven

VII. THE COUNSELING MODEL

According to UN reports 100-130 out of 216 countries in the world (including the newly formed South Sudan) are guilty of government-sanctioned⁶⁵².

The ever-present possibility of persecution for many Christians calls for response. As Daniel Kyanda of *Christian Solidarity International* in Nairobi, Kenya say in seminars on preparation for persecution: “When I see more and more Africans being converted, I just conclude that each one is a candidate for persecution”⁶⁵³.

What encouragement and healing is there for believers who see their houses and businesses being destroyed, their loved ones raped, maimed, being taken away never to be seen again, or brutally and publicly executed? Where was God when all this happened? Why doesn’t God stop it? Did God not defeat the devil – why is he still rampant? Why do the perpetrators go unpunished?

These are questions we dare not avoid if we want to minister deeply and effectively to severely persecuted believers. The majority of believers are devoid of quick answers and simple solutions in the face of severe persecution. There is a place many believers reach where reason and rationalizing have no ground. Something more is needed to lift the spirit of a persecuted believer to remain steadfast regardless of the outcome.

In his *Address to UUA General Assembly* Schulz made the startling comment: “But I have talked to dozens of survivors of torture, read hundreds of others’ accounts, and I have rarely, if ever, come across a testimony that it was faith in God

⁶⁵² Knowles, op.cit.

⁶⁵³ Reapsome, op.cit.

that saw them through the night. For when the needle slips under the fingernails and the pliers rip them off, that pain obliterates the very face of God”⁶⁵⁴.

However, his account of Perez Aguirre reveals something unusual and rare to anyone working in the field of trauma victims.

Perez Aguirre was tortured mercilessly in a South American prison. Many years later, walking along the street, he ran into the man who had tortured him. The torturer was now among those being prosecuted and he tried to avoid Aguirre’s gaze. But Aguirre took the initiative. “How are you?” he asked his torturer. The man said he was very depressed. There was a long pause and then Aguirre said, “If you need anything, come to see me.” And then, “Shake hands, friend. I forgive you”⁶⁵⁵.

Was it Aguirre’s years of trauma counseling that gave him this amazing edge or was it something else?

IS ADDITIONAL MINISTRY NEEDED?

Do we need more than just trauma counseling? Yes.

Severe persecution goes beyond psychological explanations. Human language fails to fully capture or express the trauma people experience.

Merely labeling torture survivors as having PTSD is much too inadequate to describe the complexity and magnitude of the effects of torture. Torture has an impact on the individual, the family and the community. It has a profound, immediate and long-term impact on physical and psychological health. Trauma affects a patient on the deepest, least easily controlled levels of self, and changes the way a person understands and responds to the world.

⁶⁵⁴ Schulz, pp.8-9

⁶⁵⁵ Schulz, pp.18

Clinical studies confirm repeatedly that trauma as a result of persecution and torture is very difficult to treat. Effective treatment involves helping the individual to systematically confront experiences, memories, and situations associated with the traumatic event. This treatment can result in intense emotional responses to memories of the trauma and requires considerable therapeutic skill⁶⁵⁶. To recover from severe physical and emotional trauma can take many years⁶⁵⁷. Counselors experienced difficulties when working with the aged. Problems encountered in the elderly included rigid thought patterns and coping skills, clinical depression, cognitive and memory impairment, physical injuries, inadequate support networks and practical difficulties. A prominent feature of trauma in this age group is the experience of profound despair and hopelessness which counselors have found resistant to treatment. The discovery is that psychotherapy can help, but it cannot undo the damage. People find they are changed forever⁶⁵⁸. Most of the clinical treatment is merely focused on making “the memories less painful”⁶⁵⁹.

Models such as the Danish and Wits Models find that they cannot effectively treat the resentment, anger, and rejection derived from the clients’ experiences including depression, shame, suicidal ideas, and grief over loss of loved ones, guilt about informing on others, or guilt about giving in to the perpetrators and managing to survive when many others have died. In many cases, counselors were of the opinion that clients had resorted to maladaptive ways of dealing with their anger⁶⁶⁰.

The majority of people being treated for persecution trauma have fled the situation, while many millions have no prospect of escaping their plight. These people need something more than just trauma counseling. They need something to carry them

⁶⁵⁶ Andrews, op.cit.

⁶⁵⁷ *Approaches to Trauma Therapy*, op.cit.

⁶⁵⁸ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, op.cit.

⁶⁵⁹ *Tugging at Threads to Unspool Stories of Torture*, Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Hajjiannis, Ibid.

through their experiences of the past and that which is still to come. Trauma counseling has no capabilities of coping with that which is yet to come.

CREATION OF MEANING

The revelation of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation goes much deeper than any of the teachings in the New Testament on persecution.

Jesus considered it necessary to appear to John on Patmos to minister to them in a very special way. Clinical therapists call it “the creation of meaning”.

The Wits Model proposes a “creation of meaning” component to their approach whenever the client raises “meaning issues”. This is especially important for the issues we are addressing. Whenever questions are raised such as: “Where was God when it happened?”, “Why doesn’t God stop this?” or “Why doesn’t God rescue me?” we have to do with meaning issues.

According to the Wits Model a therapist is required to engage with the client's belief system, be this on a cultural, political, spiritual or existential level in establishing meaning out of a particular event. Work in this area is designed to be respectful of the client's existing beliefs and experience, while at the same time assisting the client in deriving some meaning from the event in a way which engenders hope and some future perspective.

There is no better “larger discursive framework” which can represent a larger more meaningful narrative in the client’s life (especially when that client is disciple of Christ) than the message revealed in Revelation. That is exactly what Jesus provided to the seven churches to which the letter was originally addressed. He provided this most important larger discursive framework on which the ultimate meaning of life (and especially persecution) is based. Without this revelation believers would often

find themselves utterly defeated and extinguished. Without clear vision of the Risen Christ amidst of the Church and in the center of the universe there can be no meaningful perspective or “bigger picture”. Christ is the bigger picture!

People who triumph in persecution do not triumph because they are brave or noble, but because they see something else that is stronger than the horrors of persecution.

(a) “Where is Jesus in all of this?”

When one feels slave to the mercilessness of evil, it becomes essential to know where God is and what He is going to do about it. Where is Jesus in all of this? *Is Jesus in all of this?*

The most important aspect of counseling severely persecuted Christians is “seeing” Christ in relation to those being persecuted. One prays to God for deliverance and in one’s mind He appears on the banks of safety and security. The moment one understands that Christ wasn’t *there* but *here* in the trauma one’s heart quietens down and the peace of God floods one’s soul. One’s circumstances don’t change, but seeing Jesus in relation to the trauma changes one’s heart. That is the starting point.

The next important aspect is “seeing” Christ in relation to those persecuting. Regardless of what happens, Christ sees all unrighteousness and is ready to judge it. Nothing and no-one will escape His ruling. His eyes see everything and His actions are just. No injustice will go unpunished. All darkness will be illuminated by His light. Nobody can touch His redeemed and be unscathed. He is the Judge of all judges and the Ruler of all rulers. It is not strange that the believers in Revelation 6:10 to cried out with a loud voice, saying: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You

judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” This is a cry for justice which God will answer with vengeance. God will crush Satan under the very feet of those he tormented.

Christ truly and truthfully never abandons the Church regardless of what she suffers. The Church suffers indescribable horrors because of Satan’s unsurpassed hatred of Christ. Those who suffer for Christ’s sake will be rewarded over and above everything they have ever suffered, for God will clothe them in glory and eternal blessing.

The question is not “why does God allow this?” but rather “why do men do this?” The answer is because they do not bow their knees before the Lamb. Those not subservient to the Lamb will slaughter anyone who side with the Lamb just as they have slaughtered the Lamb, but God will treat his faithful in the same manner He treated His Son. He will raise them up and restore them to eternal glory and life.

I received a mail from a man who was jailed for seven years without any cause. In a very moving manner he thanked me for “the wings” I have given him and concluded with these words:

I remembered the words of a Jewish woman who survived Auschwitz. When she was asked “where was God in all of this?” she answered: “Not where was God, but where was Man”

Having a vision of Christ “in all of this” is the first key to healing counseling.

(b) “Who is in control?”

For millions being persecuted it might seem as if evil is out of control and all empowering. Creating meaning that will sustain persecuted believers needs to address this issue thoroughly.

Just as the vision of Christ as eternal and perfect Judge in the first vision was important, so the realities and truth of the second vision is important. The perfect power (seven horns), perfect wisdom (seven eyes), and perfect presence (seven Spirits in all the earth) of Christ is real and offers a very real comfort to those being persecuted.

The revelation of Christ offers something far more than just the preciousness of this life. To live as a human on earth is a tremendous privilege, but it is also saturated with imperfection and injustice. When someone threatens to kill you, it is the ultimate threat as this life is, regardless of its imperfections, very dear. We will fight till the very last to stay alive and to protect our lives, but Christ shows something else. Christ shows that death is by no means a deprivation of life. It is by no means the end or ultimate defeat. There is a bigger and greater reality even than this life in this time and space. There is the unseen universe – the world where God abides, where there is perfect stability and control, perfect life and security. It's a domain where all injustice is punished and where no unrighteousness prevails. Occasionally we might see spurts of that domain manifest in this life, but even more importantly, we are already part of that domain. It doesn't matter what happens to my body – I will live on forever in Christ Jesus to rule and reign with Him. "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:28-31).

The whole drama that John saw depicted in the second vision has something wonderful inscribed over it all – He did it for me! "For God so loved the world that

He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). If it wasn’t for God’s love and devotion towards mankind, none of what John saw would have happened. And for this reason “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11).

The undisputed Ruler of the universe is the Lamb of God. He is absolutely aware of everything and everyone and stands at the ready to pour the wrath of God on those who are disobedient. The only reason why He pauses is to give the wicked chance to repent. In the midst of the Church is the ruling Judge and in the midst of the universe is a Throne. God is in full control.

The Church of God is measured and accounted for. Nobody can touch it no matter what they do. Our lives cannot be destroyed no matter what happens. Our lives can be traumatized and inconvenienced but not destroyed. Our lives are in Christ and are indestructible. Even if we are killed we are not destroyed. Our reactions to what happens to us might destroy us, but if we remain at the foot of the Throne we are safe no matter what. God is in control!

It is interesting that Jesus can tell His followers that “not a hair of your head will perish”, since He has just told them that some of them will be killed. In these words we see that God’s promise of protection is far above immunity from mere bodily harm. In a sense we could compare the body and soul to the *hieron* and *naos* of Revelation 11:1-2. The body could be trampled and destroyed, but the soul is untouched because it belongs to God. The *naos* is measured and is the dwelling place of God.

(c) “Why do these things happen to me?”

What happens when the Lamb reigns? This vision is a blessing to everyone who is under the reign of Christ.

When I am conquered by the gospel of Christ's I become a recipient of God's everlasting life and love. However, there are dark and powerful forces opposed to Christ's rule who wouldn't hesitate to destroy those submitting to Christ. In fact, everyone associating with Christ and His rule will be put under pressure by those who refuse to do so.

The redeemed are not excluded from the sorrow of this world. Although they are not of this world, they are still in it and will often suffer its brokenness like everybody else.

"Why do people do these things to us?" Because they hate and rebel against God. The wicked manifests the evil to which they belong. The world thinks it strange that disciples of Christ do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation. Hence they speak evil of them. From evil speaking eventually flow evil deeds.

(d) Inspired Reactions

Against the backdrop of the revelations of Christ in the book of Revelation it is not difficult to see how it will assist the client in "deriving some meaning from the event in a way which engenders hope and some future perspective". In actual fact, Hajiannis' comments are much too limited for the "bigger picture" presented here. Christ's revelation does not enable a persecuted believer to derive "*some meaning*" which "*might engender some future perspective*". It is an all-encompassing, overwhelming flood of healing and meaning that enables a person to rise unreachably high above his situation.

Perez Aguirre's story is an example of just such heights. To face your former torturer with words such as "If you need anything, come to see me. Shake hands, friend, I forgive you" is not just *some perspective*. It is divine perspective that supercedes the abilities of mere man.

When somebody has a clear vision of Christ's position and ministry, his actions and reactions are inspired. History is full of accounts of men and women whose actions were divinely inspired in the face of torture and death. They were not "brave" but *inspired* by the vision of Christ – the center of the universe.

When Stephen was tried for his belief in Jesus as the Christ he cried out: "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:56). Through a hailstorm of stones he walked to the Lamb clothed in white linen into the rest of his Father. With his last breath he "cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (v.60).

The revelation of Christ not only heals but frees people to act according to their Father in heaven. John's revelation of Christ makes it suddenly easy to understand the New Testament teachings on persecution such as:

- (i) "Be harmless (innocent, pure) and wise". The Christian who sets Christ wholly before him is wise. Everything depends on the actual encounter with the Lord. It also has the sense of guile. Cleverly resolute action is imposed by the hopelessness of the situation and the resultant urgency.
- (ii) Believers who are being persecuted should not resist those who persecute them – not be hostile toward or return the persecutors deeds on them. The concept of suffering hostility instead of being

hostile, even enduring unjust suffering to honor God as the ultimate Judge is emphasized. God alone is the final arbiter of justice, and we must trust him to fulfill it.

- (iii) Jesus instructs persecuted believers to bless, to do good, and to pray for those who persecute them. Jesus discloses the reason why this is the desired reaction of believers towards persecutors. They are required to act in accordance with their Father in heaven. It is in action that the proof of sonship is evident.

(e) Seeing Christ

The most important question of them all remains: “How do I help people see Christ?” In his book *Celebration of Discipline* Richard Foster⁶⁶¹ describes twelve ways in which to behold the glory of Christ as it is mentioned in 2Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”.

The twelve ways (or disciplines) are divided into three categories, namely inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study), outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, and service) and corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration).

These are very helpful and sound, but in a severely restricted setting might not be so readily available for persecuted Christians. However, in the manner in which they could be practiced it would help believers to keep Christ’s vision clear in their lives no matter what happens.

⁶⁶¹ Foster, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989)

However, a simple way of achieving the vision of Christ as central and dynamic in the life of a believer, even in the face of persecution and death, is praying that God will reveal Himself through Christ in the same way He has revealed Himself to the apostle John and all the believers since then in similar circumstances.

It is important to note that there are no recipes of formulae to achieve this except for the sincere, childlike prayer of faith that is so precious to God. Following are four principles that are especially helpful:

(i) Understand the message

It is important for the counselor to understand the message of Revelation. Failure to do so will surely not result in healing counseling. If, for example, a counselor understands the two witnesses of Revelation 11:2-14 to be the actual ministry, death and resurrection of two Biblical figures it will pose no healing ministry at all. Imagine the following prayer session with Fatima who is actively being persecuted for her faith and who has no chance of escape:

“Lord, please reveal to Fatima that in the last days You will cause Enoch and Elijah to minister in the streets of Jerusalem to witness and perform wondrous deeds so that the Jews can understand You truly are Lord...”

Compare this to:

“Lord, please reveal to Fatima that the testimony of your Church is the power of God unto salvation and that even if the systems of this world quench it to silence, you will raise it up again and no man will be able to stop it...”

John’s message in Revelation was powerful because it was the Words and Revelation of God, but also because it was something he experienced first hand. He

was overwhelmed by the glory, power, majesty, and presence of God as he saw Him ruling the universe. It had a deep and lasting impact on his being. Whenever he spoke it was with spirit-conviction and power. That opened the door for everyone who heard him speak or who read his letter to also “see” what he saw and be overwhelmed by it. This is not a magic formula, but the very revelation of God. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:11).

(ii) Pray the message

It is very important to envelop someone with the Word of God as it is not merely words, but Spirit and Life. Pray together with the counselee that God will ignite the message of Revelation in his or her spirit just as He did with John and fellow believers through the ages.

The counselor could begin the session by praying passages from the book of Revelation asking Christ to reveal Himself to the counselee in a way that would minister to his need. The counselor could pray directly from a passage such as Revelation 1:6-8, 10, 12-18 (for example):

“Lord Jesus, I pray that You will reveal to Fatima through Your Spirit that You love her and that You washed her from her sins in Your own blood. You made her a king and priest. You are her God and Father. To You belong the glory and dominion forever and ever! We know that You are coming on the clouds and everybody will see You, even those who have murdered You. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty. You speak with a loud voice, as of a trumpet, and You are in the midst of the seven golden lampstands – Your Church. You are clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. Your head and hair are white like wool, as white as snow, and Yours eyes like a flame of fire. Your feet are like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and Your voice

as the sound of many waters. From Your mouth goes forth a sharp two-edged sword, and Your face shines like the sun in its strength. You are He who lives, and was dead, and behold, You are alive forevermore. You have the keys of Hades and of Death”.

The counselor could also pray a summary of the above passage (for example):

“Lord Jesus, I pray that You will reveal to Fatima through Your Spirit how You shed Your blood for her so that she might be cleansed from her sins. You have given her a place of honor and respect before your Throne because she is your beloved daughter in whom You are well pleased. Jesus, let her hear Your voice of authority and assurance that speaks louder than the noise of the world. She has such a need to see You in her situation – where You are in her life right now. Let her see You as God’s perfect Judge who stands ready to bring God’s perfect justice to a fallen world. Let her be comforted by Your wisdom and love. Let her see Your face; see your glowing feet as no unrighteousness and injustice will prevail before You. Let the sword of Your Word comfort her and protect her even in the hour of death. You are He who lives, and was dead, and behold, You are alive forevermore. You have the keys of Hades and of Death. You are the One who holds Fatima in the palm of Your hand...”

Let the truth of the message flood the soul of the counselee while you wait on God to minister and heal.

(iii) Wait on the Holy Spirit

It is God who makes the difference. It is God who heals and restores. Just as the disciples waited on God in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, we also have to prepare our hearts and wait upon the Holy Spirit to do what He wants to do.

Waiting doesn't imply pressure, but rather resting in the knowledge that God is God and truthful to His Word. It is not uncommon for a counselor to feel the pressure mount as they pray together and then wait quietly for God to minister. What if nothing happens? That is a typical reaction of the flesh of man. So what if "nothing" happens! This is God's territory and the counselee is God's child. Let God be God. There is never a situation where "nothing" happened. God always does or says something and when God does or says something it brings illumination, life and restoration to the depths of man's heart.

How should we wait? Have some time in deliberate silence. After you have prayed together, repeating God's messages and acting on it in confession, it is important to be quiet for a while. Nervous people often keep on talking to God just in case He doesn't say something. No need to be nervous around God. Be quiet and meditate on the His message if you like. God will surely respond in His characteristic gentle, healing way.

How long should we "wait"? Not long. Just relax in your anticipation. How long would be too long to wait? If you sat together in silence for 15 minutes, will that be too long? How about 30 minutes? Is it too long to wait 30 minutes or even an hour for God to minister to the broken soul of a persecuted believer for whom there is no other treatment or counseling available? Be open and available to hear God speak through an image, a vision, a thought, a Scripture – whatever. Wait in a restful anticipation.

(iv) Evaluation

Make sure that you evaluate your experience against God's Word. God will not contradict Himself. He will remain Christ centered at all times.

One of the most important characteristics of divine ministry is illumination. John writes: “In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5 NIV). The illumination that takes place can be experienced in the following ways:

- (1) It illuminates Christ in His relation to the counselee. John will “see” Christ behind him or amidst the lampstands. David “sees” Christ during the depths of persecution as the Shepherd with a rod and staff leading him through the valley of the shadow of death. That’s the central theme of the illumination: “There is the Lamb of God!”
- (2) The next illumination will be Christ’s relation to that and those around the counselee. It is the realization that the people around the counselee actually stand before God. What they do to the counselee they actually do to God. Christ confronted Saul of Tarsus with the words: “Why do you persecute *Me*?” In a world twisted by hatred, fear and the prospect of death, this is a much welcomed perspective.
- (3) Another experience of illumination will be the interaction between Christ and the counselee. Jesus is not only *here*, but He is here to *minister*. He is actively engaging in giving “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be

glorified” (Isaiah 61:3). This includes resolving issues of the heart – bitterness, doubt, fear, rejection etc.

- (4) Illumination will surely prepare a counselee for whatever might lie ahead. Christ’s life illuminates the darkness in all aspects and lifts the soul to a higher plain no matter what the circumstances. It is especially this quality of Christ’s illumination that leaves the world dumbfounded.

It is easy to evaluate whether someone has been ministered to by Christ by weighing the effect it has on the overall perspective of the counselee. If clinical therapy acknowledges that the creation of meaning changes the way a person understands and responds to the world, it will most definitely be noticeable when a counselee experiences the illumination of Christ in his heart.

ISSUES NEEDING SPECIAL ATTENTION

1. Wisdom or Treachery?

There is a time when the Church’s witness is killed by the systems and powers of this world, but that doesn’t mean all the believers are killed. If there are believers, then, why are they not testifying? Are they not denying Christ through their silence? Are they not faltering in their calling?

Persecution can and often does make the church disappear or at least be virtually invisible and unnoticed for a while (often a few decades). A report on a murdered Iraqi Christian is a good example of this. The report remarked that the

Christian community was “very shaken by the attack”, and it was feared that “many would leave the city as a result”⁶⁶².

The believers in Jerusalem encountered persecution and prayed to God for more boldness to witness about Christ regardless of the persecution (Acts 4:23-31). But at some point they fled Jerusalem because of the intensity of the persecution that started with the death of Stephen. Polhill comments: “His bold witness in both his Sanhedrin testimony and his death only served to fuel the flames. A violent persecution erupted, and the Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem”⁶⁶³.

Another example is the ministry of Jesus during His time on earth. There were times when He chose not to enter a city or region because of the possibility of arrest or violent action by the priests.

““You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come’. When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee” (John 7:8-9).

When His time came to be sacrificed He willingly entered Jerusalem knowing it would lead to His arrest and death.

“The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mark 14:41).

Then, when He was brought before Herod during His trial he refused to testify at all, but He had fairly lengthy conversations with Pilate. Luke writes:

“Then he [Herod] questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing” (Luke 23:9).

⁶⁶² *Kidnappers Allegedly Called Murdered Iraqi Christian’s Employer*, op.cit.

⁶⁶³ Polhill, p.211

Paul did not shrink back one inch in fulfilling his calling in Christ even if it meant he would be killed.

“What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

However, we see him flee from persecution in Acts 9:23-25 when he was lowered from the city wall in a basket.

When Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was falsely charged and when an attempt was made to arrest him, he fled. Writing in defense of his flight he wrote:

“For no man flees from the gentle and the humane, but from the cruel and the evil-minded... For the more the flight of their enemies becomes known, so much the more notorious will be the destruction or the banishment which their treachery has brought upon them; so that whether they kill them outright, their death will be the more loudly noised abroad against them, or whether they drive them into banishment, they will but be sending forth everywhere monuments of their own iniquity”⁶⁶⁴.

When is it wise to flee or keep silent and when is it treachery to flee or keep silent?

Spence-Jones explains Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:16-17a:

Our safety depends upon our guilefulness. ...there is a guilefulness which is really “prudence,” and this may very naturally be suggested by the quiet, gliding motion of the serpent. There is a simplicity which is foolishness. There is a simplicity which is prudent watchful of occasions, skillful of adjustments, knows when to act and when to refrain, when to speak and when to keep silence. That “guilefulness” is the

⁶⁶⁴ Schaff, *Second Series Vol. IV*, pp.257-58

practical skill of ordering wisely our life ...In doing God's work opposition is often needlessly provoked by our imprudence⁶⁶⁵.

However, he adds, "our safety also depends upon our guilelessness. The dove is the emblem of innocence, artlessness. It has no schemes, no under-intentions, no reserve. What it is you know. All its ways are transparent".

Pastor Alexander Gluchovsky of the Ukraine was sentenced to death for his faith in Jesus during Stalin's reign, but the ruling was later changed to life imprisonment in Siberia. After serving six years of his sentence he was released. As we discussed how to deal with the Office of Religious Affairs (a former KGB department) he asked me this strange question: "Why didn't the lions bite Daniel in the lion's den?" I knew the Bible answer, but also knew he had something else in mind. His answer: "Because he didn't step on the lions' tails".

The balance between witnessing and knowing when to remain silent is called wisdom. There's a time for open ministry and a time to hide. There is a time where the Church's testimony is in the streets and a time when it is killed – to be revived later. The difference is in knowing what God wants of you and doing what He wants.

When guilt is generated it is important to discern the situation. False guilt leads to bondage while true guilt to repentance.

2. Dealing with Betrayal and Denial

Spence-Jones writes:

Religious persecution has always been a test of sincerity. It finds out those who only profess, and those who profess because they possess. Only the men in earnest abide the stress of persecution. A man must care about a thing if he is willing to suffer for

⁶⁶⁵ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: St. Matthew Vol. I*, pp.439-40

its sake. Persecution is a natural process of separating tares from wheat. How many unworthy ones would be in Church relations if religion involved no strain!⁶⁶⁶.

However, what if believers do betray and deny Christ in the face of persecution? There are believers who betray Jesus like Judas did by betraying their fellow believers. There are believers who deny Jesus like Simon Peter did by denying being a disciple of Christ.

There is much to be said about the importance of perseverance till the end. However, many believers balk at the face of persecution and torture. No doubt both Judas and Peter were in dire straits after they betrayed and denied Jesus. Was it the end for them? These two disciples portray the possible reactions such believers exhibit after their sin.

In the reactions of both Judas and Simon Peter we see them to be guilt ridden, ashamed and despondent. Judas rejected himself completely – finding in that an adequate motivation to destroy himself. Peter stumbled into depression and shame trying to find shelter in his former trade. However, seeing Christ in his situation there was forgiveness and healing – and much needed restoration.

Why do people do it? There might be many reasons. These believers could have been superficially separating those “who only profess” from “those who profess because they possess”. They could have been so intimidated by the horrors of what awaits them that they sought to avoid persecution, not because they did not believe. They could have been offended by Christ during these times. “God, why must my wife and children suffer in this manner!”

During the Roman persecutions “thousands of Christians either offered sacrifices or obtained a certificate (*libellus*) saying that they had sacrificed”⁶⁶⁷. Later,

⁶⁶⁶ Spence-Jones, Ibid.

many wanted to be readmitted to the church. The agonizing question: Should church leaders accept these apostates?

After the persecutions of Diocletian (293) the church reacted in various ways to this question. In Spain the Council of Elvira, where persecution had been severe and feelings ran high, excommunicated any *sacrificati* for life. Those who had been preparing for baptism, and those who had not sacrificed but had obtained a *libellus*, were readmitted with varying degrees of penance.

In Asia Minor the church was more tolerant. The Synod of Ancyra (modern day Ankara, Turkey) said that lapsed clergy who came back to the church and suffered for the faith were allowed to keep their office but not to celebrate the sacrament. The laity could be readmitted after a period of three to five years of penance. Wounds in Asia Minor healed fairly quickly.

In Rome tension remained for another hundred years.

In Egypt Bishop Peter of Alexandria wanted a policy of leniency, for fear that the church might lose the lapsed completely. Meletius wanted severe punishment for any who lapsed, for fear that the church might lose its integrity⁶⁶⁸.

The big question could boil down to could Judas have been forgiven? Was Simon Peter forgiven? The answer is “yes”. Peter was forgiven and restored. Judas chose to “save” himself by committing suicide, but if he returned to Christ in sincere repentance he would have been forgiven.

When counseling people who betrayed and denied their faith it is crucial to know and understand God’s heart in the matter. Jesus set the example with Peter. No doubt Peter had genuine sorrow for his sin and repented in all sincerity. He was fully

⁶⁶⁷ Gooch, op.cit.

⁶⁶⁸ Gooch, op.cit.

accepted and fully restored as an apostle of the Church. His life and death (after John 21) proved the point.

Are those who endured persecution any better off than those who denied Christ? Are they any better off than those who were spared torture and pain due to their denial and betrayal? The Bible is clear:

- (a) And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Mat 10:22)
- (b) ...eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality (Romans 2:7)
- (c) Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:11)
- (d) For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end (Hebrews 3:14)

Jesus' words in Matthew 10:33 deliver a staunch warning. "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven". Paul echoes this in his letter to Timothy:

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2Timothy 2:12-13).

However, these words also offer consolation. If we are faithless, He remains faithful. God's heart about the matter is revealed in Rom 11:23: "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again".

In the face of God there is grace unspeakable and love indescribable to restore, heal, cleanse and elevate any human soul. Isn't it interesting to note that in Asia Minor where restoration happened quickly the wounds also healed fairly quickly?

Lead those who have fallen to repentance. Explain God's faithfulness and plan and encourage restoration by praying together and trusting God to minister to the counselee. Encourage fellow believers, especially church leaders, to establish contact with the counselee and engage in a process of restoration. It is also crucial that the counselor explain to the counselee that distrust among the believers is normal and not a sign of rejection. They were fearful of Saul of Tarsus even after his conversion and it took special encouragement by the Holy Spirit to convince them otherwise.

3. Dealing with Offence

Offence at Christ is a very real matter. It not only happens to those under severe persecution, but can occur in the heart of any believer even under normal circumstances.

While John the Baptist was in prison (persecution) under threat of death, he sent two disciples to Jesus to ask Him the strangest question. They were to ask: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:2). He was the one who boldly announced twice: "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29, 36). This was a sudden and strange change. Why did John ask this question? The answer lies in the ensuing passage in Matthew 11.

Jesus answered John's question by merely pointing to His works which was a clear indication that He was the Messiah. Then He added: "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." These words are incidentally also the same message conveyed in the beginning of the book of Revelation.

John was offended by Christ. John needed to get out of his predicament and it seemed Jesus didn't care. That's when offence takes root and eventually John doubted the integrity of Christ. John was not the only one to be offended by Jesus. In Matthew 13:56-57 we see the general public taking offence at Him. In Matthew 15:12 the Pharisees took offence at His words". In John 6:66 scores of His disciples took offence at Him and left. In Mark 14:27 Jesus warns His twelve disciples that they will all be offended by Him once He gets arrested and tried.

What is offence? σκανδαλίζω means, among others, to cause (someone) to give up his faith (reject, desert, have doubts about); anger, shock⁶⁶⁹. To cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey⁶⁷⁰. In actual fact, the word in its root form denote "the means whereby one closes something," e.g., the stick in a trap⁶⁷¹. It is that little thing that causes the trap to fall on the prey imprisoning him. σκανδαλίζω is the causing of a fall and σκανδαλίζομαι the actual taking place of the fall⁶⁷².

Why are people offended? People have different expectations– even different views – of Jesus. When those are not met people become disappointed in Christ. If the disciples expected Christ to liberate them from the Romans they could take offence when He didn't. The twelve disciples were offended when Jesus' enemies overpower Him and He didn't do anything about it. John probably expected the Messiah to smash the prison walls to deliver him from evil. When it didn't happen he got offended.

What is the result of being offended by Christ? There are many arguments that develop out of offence. I was terribly offended by Christ when I encountered a major

⁶⁶⁹ Newman, p.163

⁶⁷⁰ Strong, [electronic ed.]

⁶⁷¹ Kittel, pp.339-40

⁶⁷² Kittel, p.345

crisis in my life and it seemed He “didn’t deliver” me from it. Like John I asked “Are You really the One?” I accused Jesus of being unfaithful and unloving. How could He love me and just do nothing when all this happens to me? I was trapped and imprisoned. My offence caused me to turn away from Christ like so many millions have done before me – including the disciples. My trust was broken and my heart shattered. I was in a very barren place in my life.

Can such a person be restored? Yes! Millions are being restored. For some the offence runs very deep and it takes a long time to restore, but no offence is deep enough to be hopeless. That is why the vision of Christ in the book of Revelation is so powerful.

Pray together and trust Jesus for a revelation of Himself that would minister to the counselee in a special way. Lead the counselee in repentance asking god to forgive the bitterness and resulting rebellion that developed from taking offence. Instruct the counselee to *cultivate* the healing process.

4. Dealing with Distortions

Although believers may develop a strongly attested character during the pressure of persecution, they might also evolve into something very un-Christ like. Persecution as such does not purify a believer. It is only the revelation of Jesus Christ and obedience to that revelation that purifies a believer.

Persecution often causes isolation and isolation often forces believers to formulate doctrine and interpretations of Scripture that are unbalanced and wrong. There is a very real danger in facing a distorted gospel and Biblical teachings which will result in a totally distorted view of Christ. Such a distortion will eventually lead the believers astray and into bondage – totally nullifying their integrity and witness.

One has to disagree with Spence-Jones when he writes: “Many an error has been cleared away in times of persecution, but no truth was ever then lost”⁶⁷³.

Again, in contrast with Spence-Jones’ statement that religious persecution has always proved a great help to brotherhood, the opposite has often been found. He writes: “The sufferings of some, the perils of all, throw each upon the other’s keeping. The story of persecuting days is a delightful record of sweet charities and loving helpfulness in the Christian brotherhood”⁶⁷⁴. Deep animosity and distrust between believers of different Christian congregations during persecution are often found. Such is the animosity that physical violence between believers is not too uncommon.

How would one deal with distortions? In most countries where persecution is ongoing it is not possible to create training facilities or even seminars to correct distorted teachings. The best distortion-correction is the revelation of Christ. To “know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10).

The revelation of Christ is a powerful force to purify the Bride!

5. Dealing with the Lamb-Dragon

Regardless of the culture or country, the lamb-dragon will be present. Religious systems everywhere are formulated to support the political system or *zeitgeist* of the day. This lamb-dragon, as it appears in John’s Revelation, exerts great influence on the people in order to deceive them into obedience to the worldly system which in turn serves the Dragon. One testimony of a believer in Ukraine comes to mind who told of her father’s disappearance: “He went to church to confess to the priest about the negative emotions he had concerning the oppressive government. He

⁶⁷³ Spence-Jones, op.cit.

⁶⁷⁴ Spence-Jones, Ibid.

was never seen again”. The priest reported him to the authorities even before he left the church.

The command in Revelation about the lamb-dragon is significant. The Church is not called to fight the lamb-dragon, or in the case of the worldly systems, have patience with it. The church should identify it and avoid it altogether.

There are many instances where believers tried to convince the lamb-dragon that it is wrong; fighting and debating and struggling, only to be severely hurt in the process. Have wisdom! Flee and stay away.

B. THE PROPOSED MODEL

Adapting the five components of the Wits Model, this model can also be introduced interchangeably depending on the needs of the person counseled. Although this model mentions the use of trauma counseling techniques, it is not the purpose of this model. Additional trauma counseling could be done if the counselor is so trained.

It is important to remember that:

- (a) We need to wait on the Lord. Ask God what He wants you to say and do. We guide the conversation as the Holy Spirit leads. He knows best where to go and when.
- (b) We are not adequate counselors. We need Jesus. Stay dependent on Him. Be open for prophesy, visions, wisdom, etc. Let God be God in dealing with His people.
- (c) Be humble and patient. Exhibit the character of Christ as He “gently leads those that are with young”.

- (d) Ensure that people don't feel pressurized to act on something. They have to be calm and free to make their own choices – especially if they have been traumatized already.
- (e) We counsel from Scripture to the person and not the other way around. God's Word is the final authority and guideline. We don't explain Scripture in the light of emotions or experiences, but we interpret emotions and experiences in the light of Scripture.
- (f) We are on God's side and not people's side. God loves the people and so do we, but we always side with God. That is the only way to love in truth.

1. Telling/Retelling the Story.

Just as with trauma counseling it is very important to let the person tell his story. Give him the opportunity to express the often unexpressed feelings and experiences connected with his situation. If possible keep notes of his encounter to identify key aspects that will need special attention later on. Such might include:

- (a) Meaningfull issues such as “Where is Jesus in all of this?”, “Who is in control?”, “Why do these things happen to me?”, “Why does my family have to suffer this?” or “Will God deliver me?”
- (b) Symptoms of PTSD and especially those issues that might normally be label PTSD-symptoms such as:
 - (i) Issues regarding behavior towards the persecutors
 - (ii) Fear relating to be known as a Christian
 - (iii) Confusion as to when to witness
 - (iv) Guilt because of betrayal or denial

(v) Offence at Christ

(c) Confusion due to distortions and/or the False Church

2. Affirmation

Discuss with the counselee what is happening in his life and provide education about post-traumatic stress symptoms. More importantly for this model, discuss with the counselee the key issues identified in his testimony. Verify unclear aspects. Provide positive testimony from your own life where needed. Explain that Jesus is here with us, no matter what happens. He is here to minister and heal and also to prepare us for what lies ahead.

3. Addressing critical issues

As the critical issues have been identified and verified we need to pray together for Christ's revelation in the situation. Act on whatever the Holy Spirit highlighted. Always be ready to allow God to search the depths of the heart as is written in Jeremiah 17:9-10:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind”

4. Encouraging mastery

In this phase of the model the counselor assists the client to carry on with the tasks of daily living. We have already used the word “cultivate” repeatedly. This is the key factor here. Seeing Christ is the foundation of everything, but keeping that vision alive in your heart is how you build on that foundation.

(a) Encourage faith in God's revealed Word.

- (b) Explain how to cultivate victory over, for example, fear or how to cultivate healing through forgiveness. Give practical examples from your own life or other inspired testimonies from fellow believers.
- (c) Reaffirm Jesus' teachings about life and death, His final victory over sin, God's righteousness and judgment, etc.

Whenever we minister to people who are being persecuted we need to realize how special these people are. The person we pray with now might be before the Throne tomorrow – being welcomed by God and His angels with honor and glory. The person we are dealing with now is one of those saints described in the book of Revelation who overcome the Dragon by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony and by not loving their lives even unto death.

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Addendum 1

Ralph E. Bass: Detailed Outline⁶⁷⁵

Chapter 1	Vision of the Son of Man The Revelation of Jesus Christ Message to the Seven Churches The Patmos Vision
Chapter 2	The Seven Letters Message to Ephesus Message to Smyrna Message to Pergamum Message to Thyatira
Chapter 3	The Seven Letters Message to Sardis Message to Philadelphia Message to Laodicea
Chapter 4	The Throne Room Scene in Heaven The Throne and Worship of the Creator
Chapter 5	The Book and the Lamb The Book with Seven Seals Angels Exalt the Lamb
Chapter 6	The Opening of the Seals The Book Opened; The First Seal—Conquest The Second Seal—War The Third Seal—Famine The Fourth Seal—Death The Fifth Seal—Martyrs The Sixth Seal—Terror
Chapter 7	The Great Tribulation An Interlude A Remnant of Israel—144,000 A Multitude from the Tribulation
Chapter 8	The Seven Trumpets Prelude to the Seven Trumpets First Trumpet: Vegetation Struck Second Trumpet: The Seas Struck Third Trumpet: The Waters Struck Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Struck
Chapter 9	Trumpets Five and Six The Fifth Trumpet—the Bottomless Pit The Sixth Trumpet—Army from the East
Chapter 10	The Mighty Angel and Eating the Little Book The Angel and the Little Book
Chapter 11	The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet

⁶⁷⁵ **Ralph E. Bass**, *Back to the Future : A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004). pp.6-8

	The Two Witnesses The Seventh Trumpet—Christ’s Reign Foreseen
Chapter 12	The Woman, the Red Dragon and Michael The Woman, Israel The Red Dragon The Male Child, Christ Michael
Chapter 13	The Beast from the Sea and from the Land The Beast Out of the Sea The Beast out of the Land
Chapter 14	The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion Vision of the Angel with the Gospel Doom for Worshipers of the Beast The Reapers
Chapter 15	The Seven Last Plagues A Scene of Heaven
Chapter 16	Pouring out of the Bowls Six Bowls of Wrath First Bowl: Loathsome Sores Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood Fourth Bowl: Men Are Scorched Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up Armageddon Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken
Chapter 17	Babylon Remembered The Doom of Babylon Victory for the Lamb
Chapter 18	The Fall of Babylon Babylon Is Fallen Lament for Babylon
Chapter 19	The Heavenly Conqueror The Fourfold Hallelujah Marriage of the Lamb The Coming of Christ The Doom of the Beast and False Prophet
Chapter 20	The Millennium Satan Bound Satan Freed, Doomed Judgment at the Throne of God
Chapter 21	All Things Made New The New Heaven and Earth The New Jerusalem
Chapter 22	Eternal Reign in Glory The River and the Tree of Life The Final Message

Addendum 2

Warren W. Wiersbe: Contextual Outline⁶⁷⁶

The following thematic outline compares John's revelation in context with his other writings:

<i>Gospel of John</i>	<i>Epistles</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
Believe, 20:22	Be Sure, 1 John 5:13	Be ready, 22:20
Life received	Life revealed	Life rewarded
Salvation	Sanctification	Sovereignty
The Prophet	The Priest	The King

⁶⁷⁶ **Warren W. Wiersbe**, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996). Re 1:1

Addendum 3

Larry Richards: Brief Outline⁶⁷⁷

Introduction	1
Letters to Seven Churches	2–3
Things to Come	4–22
The heavenly throne	4
The seven-sealed scroll	5
Opening six seals	6
The Great Tribulation	7
Opening the seventh seal	8
The fifth and sixth trumpets	9
Mighty angel and a scroll	10
The two witnesses	11
The seventh trumpet	11
Seven key persons	12–15
Bowls of God's wrath	16
Fall of Babylon	17–18
Jesus' second coming	19
Jesus' reign	20
Great white throne judgment	20
New heavens and earth	21

⁶⁷⁷ **Richards, Larry**, and Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987). pp.1064

Addendum 4

Dr. Robert James Utley: Literary Outline⁶⁷⁸

Prologue	1:1-8
Part 1	1:9-3:22
Part 2	4:1-8:1
Part 3	8:2-11:19
Part 4	12:1-14:20
Part 5	15:1-16:21
Part 6	17:1-19:21
Part 7	20:1-22:5
Epilogue	22:6-21

⁶⁷⁸ Robert James Dr. Utley, *Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation*, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 2001). 10.