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Principles of Persecution

by James Jacob Prasch

AND TO THE ANGEL OF THE Church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:8-11).

Fruits of persecution

Let's look briefly at some of the fruits of persecution.

And Saul was in hearty agreement of putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4).

The apostles could not see the greater vision of God and they were still tied to the temple. They could not see God's purpose to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

That is one aspect. But notice that some left and others did not.

We could argue that they forgot the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:23: *But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.*

But what is really important here is that persecution caused an introspective church to become missions-minded.

Forgetting evangelism

The church began when large crowds of people were present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

An attitude of: "Let the unsaved come to us and hear the gospel" developed amongst believers. They forgot mission. By the time of Acts 10, Peter needed further revelation. He had forgotten the Great Commission: *Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

The church, including the apostles, began misunderstanding and forgetting the teachings of Jesus. Even Peter needed further clarification about what Jesus meant.

They forgot mission-mindedness. The church had become inward-looking. "The apostles are our pastors. God is blessing us. The church is growing. The Jews come here anyway for the fes-

tivals, the pilgrim feasts, so they will hear the gospel when they come here. Why should we go to them? God will send them to us." They did not understand God's purpose for the Jews to be lights to the Gentiles.

I recall when I emigrated to Israel in the late 1970s. I had been trained to do Jewish evangelism by *Jews for Jesus* in New York. And I was saying to the believers in Israel, "Listen, we can go out and begin witnessing."

And they said, "No, that's America. You don't do that here. You're going to have problems." I realised that we were going to have problems, and I understood that this was not America, but if we got Israelis to do evangelism in an Israeli way, it could succeed. But the local believers were not witnessing.

When the Likud came to power with the religious parties, the Baptist house got burned. After that they torched our meeting places at Tiberius and Beersheba. Then local Christians began standing up and saying, "Hey! They're going to burn us anyway. What are we afraid of? We may as well be hung for a pound, as for a penny."

God uses persecution to get the church going. Once a church stops being mission-minded, it will eventually stop being evangelistic. And once it stops being evangelistic, it will eventually stop being evangelical in its doctrine. Persecution is God's panacea, His way of dealing with the problem. Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Persecution gets things going. If they are going to persecute us anyway, we may as well do what we should have been doing all along.

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False doctrine leads to decline and persecution

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword [That is, the Word of God] says this: "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality (Revelation 2:12-14).

This refers to the origins of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. The Catholic Eucharist began to develop at this point. It was no longer simply a memorial meal, based on the Hebrew Passover, but it was now redefined as a replay of Calvary. By this time they were already teaching spiritual cannibalism.

False doctrines were beginning to penetrate the church.

Jesus said to the church at Ephesus: "Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Revelation 2:6).

But to the church at Pergamum, He had to say: "Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Revelation 2:15).

The word *Nicolaitian* comes from a combination of *nico* = "suppression" and *laity* = "of the people."

They set up a clergy class. They put back an Old Testament motif, Judaizing the church. Instead of 'the priesthood of all believers,' they went back to a kind of Levitical priesthood.

The extremes of this are the Roman Catholic doctrines of holy orders, the Mormon priesthood, etc.

But Nicolaitanism is simply the suppression of the people, 'heavy shepherding' in the sense of Ezekiel 34.

The very fact that leaders become heavy shepherds — as opposed to being good shepherds, leading by example, instead of lording it over the people — proves that they have already gone wrong in their hearts.

Such leaders always end up going into wrong doctrine and leading the whole church with them. It happened over and over in Old Testament Israel. All that was needed was a despotic king. God warned them when they said, "Give us a king" (1 Samuel 8:9-18), that they were making a mistake.

The church has a tendency to degenerate to the point where they accept heavy-handed leaders. Persecution comes in order to clean the bad stuff out. Once persecution ends and we begin to feel comfortable in this world, the bad stuff comes back in. The world's values and methods begin getting into the church. And we have to go through the whole cleansing process again.

Christianity really went off the rails when Constantine made it the religion of the state and it was no longer persecuted.

First principle

The first principle of persecution is this: When persecution is coming — before the persecution comes — Jesus warns the faithful church, and He warns the unfaithful church.

How do you determine between the faithful and the unfaithful? The ones who have 'ears to hear' are the faithful. The ones, who do not have 'ears to hear,' they hear, but not spiritually.

If there is one characteristic of persecution, it will always separate the faithful from the unfaithful.

Persecution will always create a clear distinction between those who really love Jesus, those who are not hoping in this world, and those who are trying to live with their feet in two kingdoms.

"He who has an ear, let him hear."

The first thing we see about persecution is that the Lord Jesus always warns the faithful church, and He also warns the unfaithful church, but only the faithful church will listen.

"O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among the ruins. "You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord.

"They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word.

"Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, 'The Lord declares,' but it is not I who have spoken?" (Ezekiel 13:4-7).

Peace, peace

They have misled My people by saying, "Peace!" when there is no peace (Ezekiel 13:10).

The false prophets tell people that there is "peace, peace," when there is no peace and they make predictions that do not happen.

We think of *peace* as the Greek idea, "an absence of conflict." The Hebrew term for peace has little to do with that. It comes from the Hebrew infinitive, *l'shalem*, "to pay, to fill, or to fulfil." Peace in Hebrew has to do with being filled, fulfilled, wholeness. *L'shalem* leads to *shalom*.

We have peace with God because the Messiah came to *l'shalem*, to pay the price for our sin. We have wholeness, completion, *shalom* because the Messiah came. He is our peace.

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you (John 14:27).

To the world, 'peace' is an absence of conflict. In his dictionary Samuel Johnson said sarcastically, but accurately, that peace is a period of preparation and deception between two wars.

Biblical peace has nothing whatsoever to do with the world's peace. Jesus did not promise us the world's peace. His peace is not an absence of conflict; it may include that, but not necessarily.

You can be in the worst conflict of your life, and have *shalom*. Or you can be in a serene position with a total absence of conflict, but not have *shalom*.

"Not as the world gives."

These people saying, "peace, peace," were not simply saying, "no conflict, no trouble, no invasion, no persecution." They were saying that everything is wonderful; everything is going smoothly; could not be better. Everybody is healthy, blessed, prosperous.

And that is what they are saying today. "Revival is just around the corner. Great blessing is coming."

And, of course, they predict things that do not happen and whitewash over their failed prophecies.

Whitewashing over the failed prophecies

And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. So I will tear down the wall which you have plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 13:10,14).

Instead of building the church up for the coming invasion, instead of preparing God's people for what is really coming, they are telling them that everything is going to be all right. But the opposite is happening.

God was trying to warn, but only those who had 'ears to hear' heard.

Nothing happens in the persecution of the church that did not happen in the persecution of Israel and the Jews. The one teaches about the other.

And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace (Jeremiah 8:11).

Prepare for persecution

The first characteristic of persecution is that Jesus warns the faithful and the unfaithful, but only the faithful have ears to hear.

I have no doubt in my mind right now that, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is telling the church to prepare for persecution.

He is telling the faithful and the unfaithful, but only the faithful will hear.

The unfaithful will follow leaders who are saying, "We have *shalom*; everything is alright; God is moving; we have blessing," oblivious to the reality. They will roll on the floor, laughing, while it is obvious that the country is going to the wall. The false prophets are saying, "Shalom, shalom." But anyone in their right mind, picking up a newspaper, knows the truth is the opposite.

Second principle

Persecution is the devil at work, but God has a hand in it. Jesus said to the church at Smyrna, *Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested (Revelation 2:10).*

Smyrna comes from the Greek word for "myrrh," meaning "death" or "anointing for burial." They anointed Jesus' body for burial with myrrh (John 19:39-40). In the Song of Solomon, the bridegroom goes to the mountain of myrrh [*Calvary*], to die for His bride (Song of Solomon 4:6).

Persecution comes from Satan. But God not only brings life from death, but good from evil; He turns persecution to His own ends.

Only people who really love Jesus are willing to die for their faith. Only people who do not love their life in this world are willing to surrender it. God uses this fact to weed out the false and unbelieving, and bring doctrinal and moral purity to His Son's bride.

The problem in persecution is that the first ones to get persecuted are the ones who need it least.

Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered (Mark 14:27).

It was always the lambs without blemish, like Jesus, who were slaughtered first. It is the Christians who do not need to be persecuted who tend to be the first victims. The others run away.

When it becomes a legal offence to be a Christian only a genuine Christian is going to say, "I am a Christian," knowing that they will lose their life.

Persecution is the devil at work. But, like a gambit in chess, God turns it to His own purposes.

Third principle

The foremost way the New Testament gives us to prepare for persecution is the hope of the resurrection.

The first thing that Jesus said to Smyrna was, *"The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life"* (Revelation 2:8).

The resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection are the same event. When we are baptized, we die with Him, but when we are resurrected, we are raised with Him. Closing in His message to Smyrna, Jesus said, *"I will give you a crown of life... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death"* (Revelation 2:10-11).

The idea is one of constantly looking to the resurrection.

You see the same thing in 2 Corinthians 4. He talks about being persecuted in verse 9 and carrying about the dying of Jesus. His death is ours in verse 10. Then, in verse 14, He says, *"knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you."*

His resurrection is ours. Jesus never said, "I am going to die for your sins." Jesus said, "I am going to die for your sins; now you get up here and die with me." Jesus did not say, "I am going to rise from the dead to give you eternal life." He said, "I am going to raise you up with me. You die with me, you live with me."

If your hope is in something other than the resurrection, you will never stand in a real persecution.

At the same time that the Lord Jesus is preparing the faithful church for persecution, Satan is trying to deceive the faithful church into thinking it is not going to happen; "We are going to be victorious! Kingdom Now! Shalom, shalom!" and the very opposite is happening.

Fourth principle

The poor are the rich because they will receive a martyr's crown.

The poor Christians are the rich ones, and the rich ones are the poor ones; just like the Dylan song in the 1970s said, "When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose."

What did Jesus say? *"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)"* (Revelation 2:9).

Even bad churches mentioned in Revelation had good people and good things, and good churches had bad people and bad things.

Smyrna is the exception.

When we know we are going to be killed for our faith, and anything that we could possibly hold onto is already gone, when we have nothing to live for except the hope of Jesus and being with Him in the resurrection, you will see how unworldly minded we become.

Instead of having a church warning us about the natural propensity of the flesh to cling to a hope in this world, we now have a backslidden church teaching us to trust in this world.

Who do you think are the rich? Some Laodicean church in the suburbs of Minneapolis, where the people are listening to prosperity preachers, naming and claiming Cadillacs? Or is it the Christians in China meeting in a rice hut, hiding from the police?

Who is rich? When we get to heaven we are going to find out who has the big mansion. The poor are the rich; it is going to be those Chinese guys.

Fifth principle

"The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9).

In the days of the early church there were two kinds of religions: *religulo licita* and *religulo illicita* — legal religions and illegal religions. Judaism was one of the legal religions. Once Jewish believers were excommunicated from the synagogue, they were no longer part of a licensed religion, and they were therefore vulnerable to persecution. In those days Christianity was simply Messianic Judaism, a Messianic sect within the Jewish faith.

The false Jews (Romans 9-11) are those who reject their Messiah. Those Jews who accept Jesus are the "faithful remnant of Israel." The others will be cut off from their own olive tree. They have the name of Jews, they are anthropologically Jews, by covenant they are Jews, but they will be cut off.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit (Romans 9:6).

They may have the birth, the religion, the culture, the circumcision, but they do not have the heart.

The principle here connects persecution with false brethren. Rabbinic Judaism is as much a false religion as any other false religion. It is as much a false Judaism as the Roman Church or the Mormon Church is a false Christianity.

The synagogues of today are deceptions which lead Jewish people away from the way of salvation into a system that rejects Torah, substitutes Torah with human tradition, and leads them into destruction.

Tremble at His word

Persecution does not begin outside of the church, or outside of the community of God's people. It always begins within.

The first persecution of the church took place within Judaism. We hear a lot about Christian anti-Semitism, and what was done by Christians to Jews. That is very, very true. But unsaved Jews persecuted Christians long before any Christians persecuted Jews.

Persecution will not come in the West by the police knocking on your door or by the government passing laws to outlaw the preaching of the gospel. Persecution always begins with those who say they are brethren, but are not — nominal Christians persecuting faithful Christians.

Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word: "Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name's sake, have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy.' But they will be put to shame" (Isaiah 66:5).

The Hebrew rendering could perhaps better be translated, "Your brothers who hate you because of the Word." These are the ones who do not heed the Word, hating those who do. They exclude you because of what is in the Bible.

The Conference of Christians and Jews in Britain is about to adopt a statement which will respect "all faiths," but not respect people's right to all faiths, and condemn proselytizing, condemn trying to convert, condemn trying to get people to leave one faith and join another.

If you say that "Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him," you have blasphemed Islam.

The growing financial power of Islam, recycling massive amounts of petro-dollars through the City of London, speaks more to politicians and businessmen than the likes of Christians. Already, we have seen British and American troops defending Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait fund the construction of mosques all over England, but will not allow one church to be built in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait.

They are funding militant Islam.

They are funding the conversion of people, particularly young black people, to Islam all over the world.

The British government cares about arms deals, petro-dollars, oil. They do not care about you and me. They certainly do not care about the gospel.

The precedent, however, is not being set by the political and financial influence of the Islamic world, but by George Carey, withdrawing Anglican patronage from Jewish evangelism and going on the radio with the Chief Rabbi, denouncing Jewish evangelism.

The first stage of persecution is never unsaved people or the governments of the world persecuting Christians. The first stage of persecution, from the time of Stephen to today, has always been false brethren persecuting true believers.

Jeremiah

Then they said, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words" (Jeremiah 18:18).

The judgement of God was coming on a backslidden nation. Jeremiah was telling the truth, the others were lying.

Jeremiah was telling the truth; he was calling their bluff in public.

He was saying stuff that they did not want people to hear. More importantly, it was stuff that they could not deny.

"Look at the rising immorality and idolatry in our society. The Babylonian Empire is breathing down our neck. You think that because you are rich and prosperous today, it is going to be like this tomorrow?

"Look at the prophets that keep predicting things that do not happen, and prophesying blessing which does not come. Do you really believe things will continue like this? Look at the facts!"

In public, Jeremiah was pointing to facts that were irrefutable and the establishment had to stop him from telling the truth. Today it is the same.

They go after Dave Hunt or anybody who tries to tell the truth. They cannot deny what we say. They just go after us for saying it.

Everybody knows it is the truth. But people are rolling on the floor and claiming that God is doing a great thing! Persecution is not coming; persecution is here. Do not worry about the Freemasons, the parliament, or the EEC. Persecution begins in the church, not outside. Formal, legal persecution is simply the natural outcome of persecution within the church.

Before Jesus warned about Satan casting you into prison (Revelation 2:10), He warned about those who say they are Jews but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9).

Sixth principle

The devil is about to cast some of you into prison (Revelation 2:10).

Persecutions, historically, have tended to be local and sporadic. It is not everybody always getting it. Even in China and places like that, it is not always everybody getting it at the same time. Something happened in Smyrna, however. With some of these emperors, like Diocletian, persecution became universal throughout the Roman Empire.

In the last days normal persecution will become compounded by some kind of universal declaration against the gospel. The Antichrist is going to condemn Christianity in the same way that the emperors did.

Do not think that in a time of persecution we are all going to get it. That is not the way persecution works. It has never been like that, except under these emperors.

It did happen then and it will happen again in the last days. The outlawing of the gospel became universal, but not everybody was killed.

In the days of Queen Mary hundreds of leaders were killed. Others fled. It will be like that.

Some get away, some do not.

Some flee, some do not.

The Lord tells some to get out of there; He tells others to stand.

Persecution is not every Christian being wiped out! It will eventually come to that, but not in the near term.

It will be sporadic; here and there; localised. Things will seem to get better for a while and then worse again.

Seismology and obstetrics

The two metaphors Scripture most uses to explain how persecution works are borrowed from seismology and obstetrics.

If you believe the tectonic plate theory, geophysical pressures cause an increased friction on the fissure where the plates come together, resulting in tremors. The tremors become more and more frequent, more and more acute, and some are worse than others, but they are all indications that the big one is coming. These build up until finally there is a major shift in the plates, which produces a big earthquake.

The other is the phenomenon of birth pangs. Contractions become more and more frequent, then they are alleviated for a while, and then more frequent again, then they slow down, then they become more intense.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now (Romans 8:20).

It gets worse, then it seems to get better for a while, then it gets worse, but the contractions become more and more frequent until the baby is born.

Think of what labour is like.

Is labour having contractions the whole time? No. It comes. It stops. It comes. It stops. You can have an easy labour or a more difficult labour.

Ultimately the labour of this world will become so terrible that there will be one massive caesarian section, called the Rapture. The Lord will get us out of here.

Seventh principle

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days (Revelation 2:10).

The Lord never allows us to suffer more than we can take.

In the early church there were ten fixed periods of persecution under ten emperors: Nero (AD 54-68), Domitian (81-96), Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Septimus Severus (193-211), Maximin (235-238), Decius (249-251), Valerian (253-259) and Diocletian (284-305).

The persecution was for a fixed period. The St Bartholomew's Day massacre of the Huguenots in France lasted just one day! The Great Tribulation, the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel, the time of Jacob's trouble, is fixed at three and a half years. God is the God of history; by Him kings reign.

One of the things that makes the Great Tribulation unique is that, for a limited period of time, within certain parameters, the lordship of history is given into the hands of Satan, to the Antichrist.

Jesus had three and a half years, so the Antichrist demands equal time.

One day. Ten days. Three and a half years. God sets parameters. As in the case of Job (1:12; 2:6), the Lord sets limits.

He never allows His people to suffer more than they can handle.

It is easy for me to say, but I can look to someone who has been through it.

When Corrie ten Boom was asked about finding the strength to suffer persecution, she said, "When I was a little girl in Holland and we were taking the train into Amsterdam, my father never gave me the ticket till it was time to get on the train."

What a saint of God! Before she went to be with the Lord, she called the prosperity preachers 'false prophets.' And she was right!

There is a midrashic parallel between Revelation and Genesis. The blood of Abel, the first martyr, cries out (Genesis 4:10). The blood of the faithful martyrs cries out from under the altar (Revelation 6:9-10).

The sovereign hand of God always regulates how far persecution can go. Either He says, "This far and no further," or else, finally and ultimately, there will be the big caesarian section and His people will be removed from the earth.

Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved... Is there no balm in Gilead? (Jeremiah 8:20,22).

This is the cry of those who missed the Rapture, just like Revelation 12. The rest of her offspring went to the wilderness and the dragon goes after them once the man-child is taken out of the way.

I know your tribulation... Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison... and you will have tribulation ten days (Revelation 2:9-10).

The Greek word for tribulation is *thlipsis*, which actually means "being pressured, to the point of anguish." The pressure gets worse and worse, just like the seismological pressure in an earth tremor, just like the birth contractions. The pressure gets worse and worse and worse, until a definite event occurs.

Do not fear... or run away

Do not fear what you are about to suffer... (Revelation 2:10).

The Greek word for "fear" here is *phobeo*, which is the source of the English word "phobia." The full meaning of *phobeo* is not simply "to fear," but to have a fear that will cause you to run away. This does not mean that you should not flee from persecution. It means that you should not flee from your faith — which is the thing that is attracting that persecution.

In other words, do not allow fear to make you abandon your faith

Look to the resurrection. Keep your eye on the baby, the end product, on what you are expecting to get out of all this. Then you will be able to handle it.

I have never met a mother who said, "I am never going to have another one." Most women I know, if they are young enough, after they have one child and it gets older, want to have another one.

Childbirth is not something that they dread. Why? Because it was worth it.

The Bible always uses that kind of language. Do not *phobeo*. Do not try to run away from the persecution. It will be worth it. Do not allow fear to make you abandon your faith.

Those who are trusting in this world will *phobeo*. Under the pressure of *thlipsis* they will fear what is going to happen to them. And because they are trusting in this life and in this world they are going to run away from Jesus.

Think about it. I know a lot of Christian girls who are midwives and obstetricians. They have delivered hundreds of babies. I have never known one of them to say, "I don't want to get married and have a baby of my own. I don't want to go through that."

They all say they want to have kids just like everyone else. They do not *phobeo*. They know what is involved. They have seen it. They still want to have a baby of their own.

Who is going to *phobeo*? The ones who only love themselves, who only love this world and trust in this life are going to *phobeo*. Jesus tells the rest of us, "Do not *phobeo*." If you are not trusting in this life you do not have anything to fear, because your hope is in the resurrection.

Jim Elliott

We see most of the bad people and bad things from America. Unfortunately the good people and the good things from America, like Dave Hunt and David Wilkerson, do not get as much publicity as the con men.

One of the best Christians America has ever produced was Brother Jim Elliot. He said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Boy, did that brother understand! And his life showed it. He is the kind of guy I want to look up to.

Demonstrating your faith

Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested... (Revelation 2:10).

Fear not. Do not *phobeo*. Do not run away from your faith. Why does Satan put them in prison? Why does God allow it? So "that you may be tested."

The Greek word *peirazo* means "to tempt, to assay, to prove or to examine." It is an acid test. God allows it to happen for His own reasons. The Bible teaches that the "heroes of faith" were tested.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword;

they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

And all of these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:37-40).

One of the lies being propagated today by the 'Kingdom Now' preachers — the teaching that the Rapture is "a fantasy and a myth" — is being used by Satan to prepare the church for deception.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Our faith should be based on the resurrection and the idea that we shall meet them, that they should not be made perfect apart from us, nor we from them. Those who are saying, "You don't have to suffer; you're a King's kid; God wants you rich; Jesus suffered and if you're suffering then you have no faith, etc." are talking about a faith that is very different to that of Hebrews 11.

They are teaching faith in faith, not faith in Jesus. They are practicing mammon worship, not Christianity.

When Job was going through tribulation he said, *As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand upon the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God* (Job 19:25).

His resurrection is our resurrection.

Even with my own eyes I shall see God. I do not care if I die. Maybe I care for now, but ultimately it does not matter. The most the devil could do is kill me. Go ahead! Pull the trigger! Even with my own eyes I shall see God and I shall watch you burn. You watch my death now and I will watch your death for eternity.

Resurrection — our hope

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

We are already seated with Christ. Your eternal destiny is assured. You have your ticket. You know where you are going. The hope is in the resurrection. If that is your hope, the rest is negotiable. If that is not your hope, you do not have ears to hear. That is what Jesus is saying.

In heavenly places

John was on the isle of Patmos during the persecution of the Roman emperor Domitian.

He saw heaven. He saw the twenty-four elders — the twelve patriarchs of Israel, plus the twelve apostles.

In other words, John saw *himself* on the throne. He was already seated with Christ.

The past, present and future are all the same to God in eternity. The Book of Revelation speaks of future events in the past tense.

And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth..." (Revelation 8:13).

"Rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

You have to understand what that means midrashically. You are either a heaven dweller or an earth dweller. You are either one of those who are seated with Christ in heavenly places or one of those who dwell on the earth.

'Kingdom Now', 'God wants you rich', 'Name it and Claim it' — those people are earth dwellers.

Whenever the New Testament talks about the Antichrist, it always begins, "Love not the world."

The people who will take the Mark of the Beast have taken it already in the attitude of their heart. It does not matter when they put the micro-chip on their wrist; those people have already accepted the Mark of the Beast, because they are hoping in this world. It is only a procedural matter for them to accept the Mark.

Some Restorationists and Kingdom Now preachers are already openly teaching that it is alright for people to accept the Mark of the Beast.

Andrew Shearman in Nottingham said, "I repented of having sung, 'This world is not my home.' This world is our home, this world is our home!"

Woe to those who dwell on the earth. The dragon and the serpent are cast down to you.

The dragon is Satan the persecutor.

The serpent is Satan the seducer.

These people are going to face internal seduction and external persecution simultaneously. Those that dwell on the earth will not stand a chance. It will only be those who dwell in heaven who are going to get out of this.

Earthen vessels

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you (2 Cor. 4:7-14).

Again, the principle is one of hoping in the resurrection. Jesus died to give others life, so He calls on us to die with Him. Paul says we have the treasure in earthen vessels. You have to understand what He is talking about.

The earth in the Middle East is a reddish clay. In Hebrew, a human being is called a *ben adam*, literally a "son of Adam," because Adam was made from the earth, *adamah*. *Adamah* comes from the Hebrew word for "red," *edom*.

The red, earthenware vessels are equated with man, who was made from the earth. The destruction of our natural bodies allows the true light inside, the real treasure, to come out and bring light into the darkness, giving life to others.

You might not be martyred, but you have to be *willing* to be martyred. That is what He is saying.

We are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:11). It is not just being killed — a one-time execution, it is a continual death to self. The fruit of persecution is death to self, in order to bring life to others.

First Christian martyr

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus was the first Christian martyr. He was numbered with the transgressors, and executed outside of the camp. Some of the animals in the Hebrew Levitical sacrificial system had to be taken outside the camp and their carcasses burnt.

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp.

Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the camp. Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come (Heb. 13:11-14).

The sacrifice of praise?

Many Christians have the wrong idea. They think that *singing* is a "sacrifice of praise."

No! It is laying your life down. It is going outside the camp, being a reproach, being counted as a criminal by secular society, even by your so called brethren — bearing the reproach of Christ.

I have no doubt that the prophecies of Daniel are being fulfilled in the reconfederation of those countries that were in the Roman Empire. By the year 2010, 80% of Britain's laws will no longer be made by Britain's parliament. They will be made behind closed doors by bureaucrats who the British did not vote for and cannot remove.

Homosexual marriages are legally recognized in Hawaii and in Denmark. Homosexuals have the right to adopt children, and have artificial insemination in lesbian marriages. This is not true in England yet, but it is coming. And who will stand against it? Only a true church. What will happen to that true church? They will be labelled as bigots, and regarded as criminals. "Sex discrimination is just as bad as racism."

Christianity will become a crime.

You will be outside the camp, numbered with the transgressors. You are going to be regarded as a criminal for your beliefs, the same as Jesus was put outside the camp and labelled a criminal. He is saying, "Come bear My reproach."

Are you willing to become a reproach? Are you willing to become a criminal in the eyes of your unsaved neighbours, even your unsaved family?

If you are willing to become a reproach, if you are willing to be labelled a criminal, you have ears to hear.

Summary

Jesus warns the faithful and the unfaithful, but only the faithful hear.

Persecution is of the devil, but God uses it to correct and purify the church

Our means of coping with persecution is our belief in the certainty of the resurrection.

Those who are poor are actually rich, because they are the heirs to the martyr's crown, the crown of glory.

Persecution begins, not outside the church, but within. It begins with false brethren.

Persecution tends to be sporadic and local. Not everyone gets it. Ultimately persecution will be universal, but do not think of it as total and absolute eradication.

Fear not, do not *phobeo*. Those who *phobeo* will run away from the faith in order to save their neck.

Look at the end result. Look at what will happen when it is over. Look at the man-child. Look at the Rapture.

Think of it in terms of a pregnancy. You really love that kid and you want that baby. How long does labour last? One day at the most? Probably less. After our daughter Batmiel was born, my wife did not say, "Never again." She said, "I am going to have another baby; it was worth it."

We will be tested. That testing will show who is who. God already knows; He wants us to know.

When we stand before Him on that day, there will be no excuses, neither will there be any apologies. It will be too late for apologies, too late for excuses.

You might not be martyred, but you have to be willing to be martyred.

If you die for Jesus, you die once and that is it. Bang! See you in heaven. If you live for Jesus, you have to die every day.

Remember my motto: *Not too many of the great men of the Bible died happy, but they were all happy to die!*

When persecution comes, some people will stand that you would not expect. Other people will fall away, whom you think would stand.

It is amazing to read the history of the English martyrs in "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," and see those people you thought would have stood, but who ran away; and other people who you thought would have run away, but they stood.

God judges the heart. He knows what is really in us. If there is one thing that is going to bring out what is really in us, it is persecution.

When persecution comes, we are really going to find out who is who. Fire brings out what is inside someone.

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:8-11).

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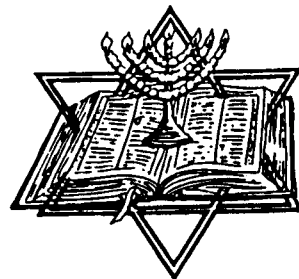
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MORIEL - GOD IS MY TEACHER



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