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***On Account of My Name:
An Ecclesial Shift Through Righteous Suffering in John 15–16***

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Introduction

A survey of ancient Jewish literature reveals a significant progression in the theme of righteous suffering. From the Old Testament through Second Temple Judaism, the literature underscores that suffering, while always normative for believers in God, was never a promised consequent for one's faith in God prior to the New Testament. The suffering God's people endured during these eras was on account of their covenant disobedience or was merely an assumed reality with the hope of a future without suffering. Beginning with Jesus in the New Testament, affliction is promised for God's people explicitly as a direct consequence for their obedient faith in God. Such promised righteous suffering finds its most definitive expression in terms of persecution and affliction in the upper room discourse of the Gospel of John.

By surveying the relevant literature and highlighting John 15–16 as a backdrop, this article will demonstrate that Jesus's promise of suffering for Christians is a distinction in the history and literature of God's people.¹ Specifically, it will argue that the phenomenon of suffering, which, out of the four Gospels, is promised on account of Jesus's name only in John 15, suggests an ecclesial shift from the people of God in the OT to the people of God in the NT, as well as from believers living in between the Testaments.² Simply stated, believers in the OT suffered for their lack of faith (or disobedience), while believers in the NT are promised suffering for their obedient faith. Through the phenomenon of righteous suffering, therefore, a distinction is made between the peoples of God with the church being unique as marked by Jesus's promise of suffering for His namesake during the upper room discourse. The article will conclude by drawing modern day relevance as Christian suffering reveals God's glory and is the natural result for those who have exchanged their life and death for Christ's life and death.

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¹ While John does not use explicit terms for "promise" (Gk: ἐπαγγέλλω and its cognates), the concept is present. Some may argue that "prediction" is a better word to use since a promise can imply the person making it is also the person who will accomplish it (eg., Rom 4:21). But such implications are not demanded by the word. Thus, the article uses "promise" (ἐπαγγέλλω) as defined by Montanari as, "to announce, declare, proclaim." Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, eds., Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 733.

² The language of suffering in John 15:21, 16:3, et al. is future tense (it will happen) which distinguishes this passage from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:11, the latter being temporal and aorist. In other words, John is predictive, and Matthew is descriptive.

Disciples as “Christians” In John’s Gospel

Though not “Christian” in the technical sense of individual regeneration and corporate baptism after the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus’s disciples do constitute the Christian church in seed form. Anticipation of the coming Holy Spirit envelopes the narrative in John 14–16, forecasting a new type of assembly previously unknown and comprised of the collective band of Jesus’s followers.

In Matthew’s account, Jesus would promise to build “my church” (μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), thus establishing a new messianic community bearing allegiance to Him (Matthew 16:18).³ In John’s account, the narrative uses the language of “my sheep” (πρόβατά μου) to distinguish a new assembly for God’s people belonging to Jesus (John 21:16; cf. 10:26–27). In fact, throughout the Fourth Gospel (FG), the disciples individually, as well as corporately, stand for later Christians as the widening of the term “disciple” (μαθητής) develops into what Andreas Köstenberger argued as “one not constrained by boundaries of time and space.”⁴ Of all the Gospels, the FG uses the most expansive language to describe disciples—both believers present in the narrative as well as forecasting future believers in Jesus. They are “people whom [the Father] gave [Jesus] out of the world” (John 17:6), and “Those who will believe in [Jesus] through their word” (v. 20).⁵ It is therefore proper to refer to these believers in Jesus in the FG as “Christians” or pioneering members of the “Church,” even if in germinal form, without charge of anachronism. What is especially relevant is that the suffering promised to this nascent church in John 15–16 separates this new community of God’s people from previous and future expressions of God’s people.

Righteous Suffering Distinguishes God’s Peoples

This article defines “righteous suffering” as simply any mental or physical trauma, whether in the form of an event or emotion, endured by those who believe in the biblical God. As an event, the suffering may entail forms of persecution for a believer in the biblical God, or their family ostracizing them for their faith, or even economical depravation due to the believer’s witness for God in Christ. As an emotion, the suffering may include a believer’s heartache, grief, or sadness that results from a traumatic event such as family rejection or economic deprivation due to a person’s faith. Though they usually go hand in glove, they can each stand alone and be considered “suffering.” This is because, as Brian Tabb noted, suffering in the ancient world, as well as today, is broader and more holistic than physical pain. His comparison of suffering in the Second Temple period is especially helpful, as he defines suffering as “the individual or group experience of bearing physical, psychological, economic, and/or social pain, distress, or loss.”⁶ Many times this includes personal distress or grief; other times it does not. One may experience

³ Assuming Jesus’s words recorded in Matthew historically predate their publication, this reference to “church /assembly” in Matthew 16:18 is the first instance of the word ἐκκλησία in the NT. By Jesus’s use of the pronoun μου, ‘ἐκκλησία’ takes on a newer technical meaning not found in the LXX, extending past mere “assembly.” It is a specific assembly—Jesus’s assembly—or in other words, the Christian church.

⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 149.

⁵ For the futuristic sense of the present active plural participle πιστευόντων in John 17:20, see Lidija Novakovic, *John 11–21 BHGT* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 207; and Murray J. Harris, *John EGGNT* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 292.

⁶ Brian J. Tabb, *Suffering in Ancient Worldview: Luke, Seneca and 4 Maccabees in Dialogue* LNTS 569 (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 11.

a form of persecution, for example, but lack personal anguish over the situation. Indeed, they may even count themselves as blessed and rejoice over it, such as the apostles did in Acts 5:41 (cf. 1 Pet 4:13). Thus, for this article, “suffering” is thought of as both objective and subjective.⁷ But what makes such suffering righteous?

As defined earlier, “righteous suffering” is mental or physical trauma in the form of an event or emotion endured by those who believe in the biblical God. They are “righteous” people by virtue of their faith in the true God revealed in Scripture. Beginning with Abram in the OT and throughout the intertestamental period, these were Jewish believers in Yahweh bonded to Him by covenant (Gen 12:1–3; 15:18; 17:7). It says explicitly of Abram, “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6, emphasis added). In an OT passage quoted three times by NT authors, God told the prophet Habakkuk, “The righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; cf. Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38, emphasis added).⁸ Paul in the NT picks up this idea as he outlines his gospel theme in Romans for all people, both believing Jews and Gentiles: “For in it [i.e., the gospel], the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16, emphasis added). He later says in Rom 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified [or made “righteous”] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” As such, it is the concept of righteousness through personal faith that defines God’s people and is understood as such in this article vis-à-vis trauma and God’s people, or, in other words, “righteous suffering.”

In Jesus’s final discourse in the FG, promises of affliction underscore a unique distinction previously concealed. Fronted with a first-class condition in John 15:18, Jesus makes plain that “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. . . . Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” Following these remarks are Jesus’s promises of “persecution” (διώκω) for His disciples in v. 21, before elevating future suffering to the extent of being “put out of synagogues” (ἀποσυνάγωγος) and even “physical death” (ἀποκτείνω) for the disciples in 16:2. Finally in 16:33, Jesus delivers the most explicit promise⁹ of “affliction” (θλίψις) with, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.” Centered in the middle of these promises of suffering is Jesus’s direct statement of reason, in 15:21: “But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” With these promises a distinction is made between God’s people via the phenomenon of righteous suffering.

In former times, suffering for God’s people occurred when they acted in disobedience or disbelief (Psalm 95:7–11; Hebrews 3:16–19). Now, they will suffer for their obedience and belief in God. Capturing the remarkable distinction suffering makes between the OT and NT, Hugh Stevenson Tigner observes:

A striking change has taken place in the attitude toward man’s sufferings on this earth. Suffering hurts as much as ever, and continues to have its original problem of endurance; but in the New Testament it presents no perplexity to faith; the mortal sufferings of the righteous along with the unrighteous do not embarrass the Christian confidence in God’s government. It is now taken for

⁷ With some variation, see Gerald W. Peterman and Andrew J. Schmutzer, *Between Pain and Grace: A Biblical Theology of Suffering* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 13–35, who make helpful distinctions between “pain” and “suffering.”

⁸ For nuances of the noun אֱמוּנָה (“faith, faithfulness”) in Hab 2:4, see Cory M. Marsh, “A Theology of Believer’s Repentance in Habakkuk from a Triadic Interpretative Approach,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 92 (2021): 201–223.

⁹ Or statement of fact, depending on how one translates the present active verb in 16:33, ἔχετε—“you all [will] have.”

granted that there is no way from man's present situation to the Kingdom of God except through a valley of suffering and a field of trial.¹⁰

This phenomenon of suffering, which the FG promises on account of Jesus's name only in John 15, demonstrates a subtle, yet significant, ecclesial shift from the people of God in the OT to the people of God in the NT. While suffering was always normative for believers in God, the fact that this section in the FG promises it as a direct consequence for correct faith is a feature reserved exclusively for the NT. Brian J. Tabb suggests a sharp distinction between persecution and suffering by virtue of being a Jesus follower and that of OT saints: "Believers suffer like Jesus and for his name."¹¹ In other words, it is the notion of suffering promised in accordance with their faith in God (e.g., persecution) that separates NT believers apart from believers in the OT as well as believers living in between the Testaments.

In one of the most comprehensive studies offered on Christian suffering by persecution, Scott S. Cunningham outlines six "theological functions" of suffering expressed specifically through Luke-Acts.¹² Enveloped by accurate conclusions such as persecution being divinely ordained under God's providence, its suffering as an integral consequence of following Jesus, and that persecution provides the impetus for the Christian's perseverance, he noted one that lacks further qualification: "The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets of old."¹³ Though correct that there is a line of continuity by way of persecution and suffering of God's people between the Testaments, OT prophets were never promised such suffering on account of righteousness or Yahweh's name sake (contra. 15:21–25; cf. Matthew 5:10). In other words, while suffering forms a link of continuity specifically between the Old Testament (OT) and the NT, it is only in the latter where such affliction is promised for righteous behavior. That is, predictions of suffering in the NT are not due to rebellion or faithlessness but by virtue of faithfulness and obedience to God (cf. Acts 20:23; 1 Thessalonians 3:3–4).¹⁴

In fact, a survey of the pertinent literature reveals a significant progression in the theme of righteous suffering beginning in the OT, through the Second Temple Judaism, to its most definitive expressions in the NT. Broadly speaking, suffering occurred among God's people in OT Israel for their covenant infidelity. During Second Temple Judaism, suffering developed into an assumed reality with expectations of a future reversal. Righteous suffering then becomes explicitly promised as a direct consequence for faith in God in the NT (esp. John 15–16). A future age is anticipated through each of the transitions where there will no longer be suffering for God's people. Thus, "Christian suffering," as in righteous suffering ordained for God's people during the present age, is a unique distinction in the history and literature of God's people.

¹⁰ Hugh Stevenson Tigner, "The Perspective of Victory: The Problem of Human Suffering in the Old and New Testament," *Interpretation* 2, no. 4 (Oct. 1958): 403.

¹¹ Brian J. Tabb, *Suffering in Ancient Worldview*, 217. Emphasis in original.

¹² Scott S. Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSup 142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ It bears repeating that what I am arguing is for the concept of promises of righteous suffering being unique for NT saints, which extends past a mere word study of "promise." There are exceptions in the OT of afflictions declared or promised for specific saints, for example Jeremiah 1:19, but such was not the norm for God's covenanted people. Instead, suffering for unrighteous behavior or covenantal disloyalty was the norm for the ancient Jews as will be shown.

Suffering in OT Israel: Covenant Infidelity

Jeremiah, a remarkably faithful prophet to Yahweh, experienced multiple hardships throughout his thirty-year ministry to Judah. He declared, “O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake [עָלַי] I bear reproach” (Jeremiah 15:15). Such a lament was surely the appropriate response for enduring his suffering.¹⁵ Though, here and throughout the book, the prophet was never told that he must suffer for his righteous faith. He merely reflected on the suffering he endured.

Jeremiah’s experiences echo that of David who suffered “reproach” (כְּלָמָה) both for his iniquity and for his faithfulness (Psalm 69:7). Yet David, like the other saints living under the Mosaic economy, was never promised affliction as a direct consequence of his obedience. Rather, when he suffered, it was due to his own sin and rebellion against God’s law (e.g., 2 Samuel 12:9–14). Furthermore, the Scripture is clear that the exilic prophet Daniel and his three friends were heavily persecuted as they worshiped Yahweh alone in the midst of pagan Babylon, as did Ezekiel during his twenty-year ministry. Indeed, they endured suffering; but, they were never promised it.

It goes without saying that these noted OT characters suffered incredible afflictions as members of a covenant community. However, they were never promised them specifically by virtue of their faithfulness to God’s name’s sake. That is, unlike the afflictions prescribed for believers in John 15–16, faithful Israelites who suffered in the OT largely did so non-prescriptively. Trauma was not explicitly assured for OT saints because of their faithfulness to the covenant or because of their witness on behalf of Yahweh. Instead, the general witness of Israel’s canonical history is that when believers in Yahweh did suffer afflictions, they did so as a result of their lack of faith or covenant infidelity, expressed in wicked behavior.¹⁶ Scholars have documented overwhelming instances of this. Especially in the Pentateuch, suffering, almost without exception, resulted from disobedience.¹⁷

As for explicit promises, the greatest contrast can be seen between “blessings” prescribed for covenant obedience in Deuteronomy 28:1–14 with “curses” prescribed for covenant disobedience in vv. 15–68 (cf. 7:11–15). Faithfulness to the covenant resulted in enjoying Yahweh’s love, abundant families and harvests, increased livestock, and protection from sickness and enemies. Disobedience, however, resulted in suffering sickness, disease, death, defeat in war, famine, barrenness, and lack of provision. “As with blessing,” observes Russell L. Meek, “the curses are conditional upon the people’s behavior and come from the hand of Yahweh.”¹⁸ Unlike the suffering promised in the FG, suffering in Israel’s history was a result not of righteous faith, but of unrighteous faithlessness. Extending past the books of Moses, Israel continued to experience famine, disease, and death due to rebellion throughout her history. As Tigner

¹⁵ See Jill Firth, “Spirituality from Depths: Responding to Crushing Circumstances and Psychological and Spiritual Distress in Jeremiah,” *The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health*, ed. Christopher C. H. Cook and Isabelle Hamley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2020), 115–127, for traces of the prophet’s possible moral injury expressed in lament.

¹⁶ Of course, Job provides a possible exception. But his historical placement within the history of national Israel is disputed. Nevertheless, Job himself was never promised his personal suffering as a result of faithfulness. In fact, he was never given an answer to his suffering. Only the reader of Job is privileged with that information.

¹⁷ For a list of examples, see Stephan J. Bramer, “Suffering in the Pentateuch,” in *Why O, God? Suffering and Disability in Church*, eds. Larry J. Waters and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 87–97.

¹⁸ Russell L. Meek, “Truly God is Good: Suffering in Old Testament Perspective,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 9, no. 2 (2016): 153–154.

explains, “The prophets were frequently aggravated to say that it is only through being hammered over the head that Israel will learn any sense, and will be brought to recognize who is the Benefactor and Lord.”¹⁹ Along with Habakkuk’s prophecy (Habakkuk 1:1–11), the two exiles of national Israel were monumental witnesses to this fact (2 Kings 17:7–23).²⁰

Suffering in Second Temple Judaism: Future Reversal

Following the canonical witness, a development can be detected within Second Temple literature. Suffering does become more of a reality for righteous faith; though, it still lacks explicit promise or prescription for righteous faith or suffering exclusively on account of Yahweh. The portrayal of suffering believers during this period is most explicit in the warnings and martyrdom portrayed in 2 Maccabees (e.g., 2 Maccabees 6:12–16; 7). Cautiously, like other contemporaneous Hellenized literature, its relevance for NT studies has been questioned.²¹ Never considered a sequel to the celebrated 1 Maccabees or even a prequel to 3 Maccabees, it is more akin to the disputed 4 Maccabees, which portrays embellishments of the martyrdom contained in 2 Maccabees, even to the point of containing atoning significance for national Israel.²²

Nevertheless, 2 Maccabees does paint a stunning portrait of believers in Yahweh who suffer persecution at the hands of Seleucid oppressors on account of their faithfulness to covenant laws.²³ Ultimately, bodily resurrection is the clear hope of the author of 2 Maccabees, providing courage and endurance for faithful martyrs.²⁴ A theme of *lex talionis* emerges from the book demonstrating that certain events in Jewish history “show God at work caring for his people, rewarding the faithful and punishing the impious.”²⁵

Though the Jewish believers in 2 Maccabees endure chastisement and barbaric torture while remaining faithful to the law (e.g., 7:1–42), the narrative is more reflective of the OT than the afflictions explicitly promised for believers in John’s Gospel. For example, within the very pericope describing a heroic family being severely persecuted, 2 Maccabees explains: “For we suffer thus for our sins. And though the Lord, our God, is angry with us a little while, for our chastisement and correction, yet he will be reconciled again to his servants” (7:32–33; cf. v. 18). The suffering pictured for believers in 2 Maccabees is endured, even acknowledged, but never prescribed as a result for one’s faith. Rather, it is more akin to OT thought where suffering is a consequence to sin instead of a reward for faithfulness (e.g.,

¹⁹ Tigner, “The Perspective of Victory,” 402

²⁰ See Cory M. Marsh, “A Theology of Believer’s Repentance in Habakkuk from a Triadic Interpretative Approach,” 215–221, for more on the theme of Israel’s wickedness contrasted with the need for righteous faith and personal repentance.

²¹ Daniel R. Schwartz, “Maccabees, Second Book of,” *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 905, goes so far as to say, “[2 Maccabees] has no status at all in the Jewish tradition.”

²² Larry R. Heyler, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 408.

²³ Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 22, describes the book as “[t]he greatest example of piety in the face of persecution.”

²⁴ Heyler, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 164, observes the sporadic impact 2 Maccabees has had on Christians throughout history, specifically for its portrayal of suffering among the faithful to martyrdom.

²⁵ Harold W. Attridge, “Historiography,” *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, ed. Michael E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2:178.

Exodus 34:7). In other words, unlike the FG's witness in John 15, Maccabean believers in Yahweh were never promised such afflictions for their faith.

Within the sectarian and apocalyptic literary traditions of the second and first century BC, a further development concerning the theme of suffering for believers is noticeable. Two prominent examples are found within the DSS Community Rule 1QS and the Book of Enoch.²⁶ Discovered in cave one at Qumran in 1947, the Community Rule scroll (also called Manual of Discipline) is the oldest example of "rule literature" genre and focuses much of its contents on communal, ascetic life governed by rigorous rules that function to transform community members into spiritual priests.²⁷

One explicit reference of a promise of suffering for the righteous concerns fifteen council members of the community, made up of twelve laymen and three priests: "They shall preserve the faith in the Land with steadfastness and meekness, and shall atone for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction" (1QS 8:1–4). Though certainly a promise of suffering to the faithful, it clearly differs from afflictions promised in John 15–16.

In the latter, afflictions are explicitly assured for one's explicit faith in God and on behalf of His name's sake (cf. 15:21). In 1QS, afflictions are not prescribed for suffering on behalf of Yahweh or merely living according to the Mosaic law.²⁸ Rather, it is anticipated suffering that extends to all the particular laws designed for this particular council within the particular community. That is, the council was to remain faithful to specific community mandates that pertained to the sectarian group. This included a certain number of years of service, rules for clothing, touching and non-touching of certain communal foods and drink, spitting in the assembly, and even rules against laughing too loudly (6:20–7:25).²⁹

Thus, the affliction prescribed for the fifteen-member council was legalistic in nature and tied to extensive law-keeping so much so that their suffering was to have "atoning effects for sin" (1QS 8:4). Nevertheless, though such suffering promised clearly differs from that in John 15–16, a development from the OT in the theme of righteous suffering is present in the sectarian literature—perhaps, most surprisingly, by cryptically forecasting an obedient law-keeper who would indeed atone for sins "by His" suffering.

Like 1QS, a progression in the theme of righteous suffering is detected in the apocalyptic text of 1 Enoch.³⁰ Among the Jewish apocalypses, Enoch is among the most explicit concerning suffering believers enduring persecution. Particularly, the so-called Book of the Watchers (chs. 6–11) is pervasive with language depicting various afflictions. Though, the work never explicitly identified persecution as the

²⁶ This section refers to "the Book of Enoch," "Enoch," and "1 Enoch" interchangeably.

²⁷ See, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, "The Community Rule," The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls, <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/community>.

²⁸ Additional portraits of eschatological suffering are found in 1QS 3:21–23 and 10:16–17. However, in the former, suffering is stated to be caused by a wicked angel's diabolical rule and leading the righteous astray. In the latter, suffering is expressed in a poem reflecting Habakkuk 3, merely assuming the reality of affliction in the world while commending a worshipful response in its midst. Both instances differ from John 15–16, where suffering is explicitly promised as a direct result of their exclusive faith in God (through Christ).

²⁹ See Reinhard G. Kratz, "Law of Wisdom: Sapiential Traits in the Rule of the Community (1QS 5–7)," *Hebrew in the Second Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. 108, ed. George J. Brooke and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 133–145.

³⁰ For a helpful recent survey of the Enoch collection, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha and Second Temple Judaism: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 21–91.

genesis for the book's composition. "Rather," as John J. Collins explains, "it provides a lens through which any crises can be viewed."³¹ Because of this, John 15–16 finds its closest ally with 1 Enoch.

While Enoch shares similarities with John's Gospel in that both are written from a Jewish worldview that included apocalyptic thought, their dissimilarities become evident when the distinction of righteous suffering as argued here is recognized. That is, much like other Jewish works predating the NT, Enoch does not explicitly identify suffering as a promised result by virtue of one's faith in Yahweh. Instead, the book is framed by sufferings presented as having to be endured by the righteous while afflictions are poured out on the wicked.

The book initiates with, "The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation, when all the wicked and godless are to be removed" (Enoch 1:1–2). Assuming "the elect and righteous" stand for believers in Yahweh, though they are identified as "blessed," they are not promised suffering as a direct consequence of their faith or on account of God (as is promised in John 15–16). Rather, it is the "wicked and godless" who are promised suffering for their deeds. While the righteous are anticipated to endure suffering, it is portrayed as a basic assumption living in a world alongside the wicked, particularly during a day of tribulation and retribution against sinners (e.g., Enoch 96:2). Such is the nature of apocalypticism in general, and Enoch, in particular. God's people are to anticipate a future, sudden reversal of fortunes where they are delivered from oppression presently suffered and where the wicked are punished for their tyranny (cf. Enoch 91:11–13). Though "healing" for afflictions suffered is expressly promised (v. 3), afflictions promised as a direct consequence for righteous faith in Yahweh are not. They are assumed as a present reality.³²

Doubtless, the Enoch apocalypse is intended to evoke a sense of awe and conviction regarding coming judgment in the eschaton.³³ The book "enables the faithful to cope with the crises of the present and so creates the preconditions for righteous action in the face of adversity."³⁴ By the end of the book, the faithful are encouraged to be hopeful even though they will experience "shame through ill and affliction" (Enoch 104:2). The final two chapters then present a clear divide between the righteous and the wicked—with elements of suffering acknowledged for both—before closing with warnings to the faithful not to act like the ungodly (104:6–13). Enoch then concludes with a cryptic messianic expectation of "the Son" in 105:2.

The Book of Enoch betrays a clear development in the theme of suffering believers that, like 1QS, begins to separate its contents from its canonical predecessors while anticipating explicit promises of suffering for one's faith in the NT (particularly those in John). Because the work describes suffering that the righteous will endure, even cryptically tying it to a reference to Christ, there is more affinity with its presentation and John's Gospel than with other Jewish literature predating the advent of Jesus. As such, an economical transition by way of righteous suffering is suggested in Enoch that will find its fullest revelation in NT writings. Though similarities are present, as the theme of righteous suffering developed, a significant difference remains. The suffering of the righteous in Enoch are described and assumed in the

³¹ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 75.

³² Anthea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 313–335, argues portions of Enoch (e.g., The Apocalypse of Weeks) emerged as literature of resistance against an oppressive Hellenistic imperial rule that was being experienced by its author(s). Thus, descriptions of sufferings for God's people are assumed as a present reality while retribution awaits a future age.

³³ See the overview presented in D. S. Russel, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 51–53.

³⁴ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 75.

present, while a great reversal of them is clearly expected in the future. In John (particularly, chs. 15–16), righteous suffering is explicitly promised for the present, while any such reversal in the future is assumed. Thus, in the main, righteous suffering in Second Temple Judaism is never explicitly identified or promised to occur exclusively because of one’s faith in God. That explicit revelation would have to wait until Jesus’s statements in the FG, and elsewhere in the NT.

Suffering in the Church: A Promised Consequent

The explicit promises of affliction for Christians “on account of Jesus’s name” or because of their faith in John 15–16 have already been discussed. What will be developed further here is that the afflictions the FG promises for believers comprising the Christian church, not only separate the current economy from those above governed by Mosaic law, but also from future ones where peace and justice will reign supreme (cf. Isaiah 11:6–9; Zechariah 14:20–21).

In the only other occurrence of *θλιψις* (“tribulation, affliction, suffering”) in the FG besides that at John 16:33, Jesus drew an illustration comparing the suffering of the disciples to that of a woman in labor (16:21). Much has been written on this passage over the years, from those considering it an allegory representing Christianity replacing Judaism,³⁵ to those who view it as an enigmatic reference to Mary as the woman in labor and leaning on the crucifixion scene at 19:25–27 as support.³⁶ Others, such as W. H. Brownlee, go so far as to equate the apostles with the woman suffering hardship in the illustration who would give birth to the risen Jesus.³⁷

Yet because the operative word for suffering or “tribulation” (*θλιψις*) exists only twice in the FG and in the same discourse, it is best to view them as illustrating a single truth with the latter reference in v. 33 advancing the former in v. 21. Though both statements end in encouragement, pain interpreted as suffering is still promised in the pericope and thus an anticipated reality for believers. In his exposition of the passage, Raymond Brown offered insightful implications for the suffering promised in 16:21, 33 and recognized its uniqueness to the Christian church era.

After comparing the uses of *θλιψις* throughout the NT, Brown rightly advocated for a “realized” perspective in John that views the suffering promised in chapter 16 with a double focus. The first, v. 21, is the sufferings promised for the disciples brought on by the death of Jesus. The second, v. 33, refers to their continued affliction under persecution as they minister in the world following the death of Jesus.³⁸ For Brown, Christian affliction is a “suffering which precedes the emergence of the definitive divine dispensation.”³⁹ In other words, affliction promised to the disciples in John underscores not only a unique discontinuity distinguishing Israel’s economy from the Christian church but also serves to distinguish the Christian church from the economy of the future eschaton. After all has been said, a transition of dispensations is observable by way of explicit suffering promised for believers throughout the Jewish and Christian literary tradition and finds unambiguous expression in John 15–16.

³⁵ Alfred Loisy, *Le Quatrième Évangile* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1903), 785–791.

³⁶ A. Kerrigan, “John 19, 25–27 in Light of Johannine Theology and the Old Testament,” *Antonianum* 35 (1960): 369–416, esp. 380–387.

³⁷ W. H. Brownlee, “Messianic Motifs of Qumran and the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956–1957): 12–30, esp. 29.

³⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 733.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

A Revelatory Paradigm of Glory Through Righteous Suffering

The FG's logic of suffering is especially heightened in the upper room discourse of John 14–16. Throughout the narrative, the theme of suffering promised for believers elevates from inner angst to physical death. Phrases are used throughout the section depicting suffering as turmoil, grief, and various afflictions anticipated for believers as a community. Though, John's perspective of Jesus's own suffering is enveloped not in misery but in glory. As such, those who suffer as followers of Jesus are to glorify God in their sufferings.

The disciples' mentally troubled state over Jesus's going to the Father initiates the discourse before progressing to promises of both hatred and persecution from nonbelievers due to their faith in Jesus (15:18–21). This theme of promised righteous suffering elevates throughout the narrative to assurances of extreme agony involving expulsion from communities and even murder resulting from one's faith in Jesus (16:2–3). An all-too-real principle emerges, teaching that because Jesus suffered in both life and death, those in Christ are at times called to suffer in both life and death.

As argued throughout this article, trauma promised to the disciples on behalf of their witness of Jesus Christ is unique in the history of God's people. Yet, it is a continued history in which the church still finds itself. Viewing the disciples as paradigms for later Christians, Jesus's varied promises of tribulation within John 15–16 extends to believers past the first century. Like Jesus's own physical suffering, which the FG presents as real, suffering promised to His followers are real as well—with God's glory as their end for both. Not to be understood as suffering for suffering's sake or in manners of self-inflicted masochism, all the afflictions portrayed in and for believers throughout the FG carry a doxological intention.

Moreover, such trauma is not presented as an exception. Rather, it is the expectation of the Christian life. According to John's logic of suffering, which is grounded first in Christ's suffering, there is a necessity for actual, real-life afflictions for believers to experience since a “servant is not greater than his master” (15:20). The Johannine witness here is clear that Christians are to expect hardship for their faith in Jesus, who experienced it first. As Brown and others have noted, this separates the church from previous and future expressions of God's people.

The suffering Jesus promised for His namesake in John 15 was not restricted to that group or even to those in the first century. Charles E. Hill provides accounts of persecution and harassments suffered by Christians well into the second century. Despite trying to live peaceably within a Greco-Roman culture that hated them, Christians living under the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AD 161–169) were tried and executed for failing to venerate local gods. Later, Christians living in Gaul suffered public harassment, confiscation, arrests, and several brutal executions.⁴⁰ Through various accounts, John's Gospel was appealed to by these early Christians for strength, truth, and comfort.

Of course, Christian persecution did not cease in those early centuries. Scholarly volumes have been written that document persecution and martyrdom through the middle ages up to recent times.⁴¹ Alluding to Christian persecution at the hands of militant Islam groups such as ISIS, “Recent events in our own day,” notes Hill, “offer horrifying reminders that the ‘time’ is still with us when some believe that

⁴⁰ Charles E. Hill, “Culture,” *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, RBS 86, ed. Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 267.

⁴¹ Recent, noteworthy examples are, Paul Middleton, ed., *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), and Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs Under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

the worship of their God justifies or even mandates the killing of Jesus's followers."⁴² Christian ministries abound in today's world dedicated to serving the persecuted church, which report estimates exceeding 90,000 Christian deaths per year resulting from severe persecution.⁴³ Thus, believers in Jesus today should not think of persecution from nonbelievers as suggestive of a faith in error. Rather, as Köstenberger and Patterson state, a believer with a proper faith-filled perspective "will be able to recognize more readily that even adversity and rejection are ultimately ordained by God for his sovereign purposes."⁴⁴

Throughout the Johannine narrative, the disciples as a group were promised they would be persecuted for their faith in Jesus whom the world hates. Yet empowered by Spirit, they were to anticipate it and remain vigilant in their witness regardless of such suffering. Because Christ overcame affliction, so can Christians—guaranteed by Jesus's promise of His return for them and the Holy Spirit's help (14:3, 14–16; cf. 16:33). Contrary to non-Christian ideas of death, the Christian sufferer has real, factual hope. In a recent monograph devoted to early Christian thought and practice concerning death, Jeremiah Mutie details how beginning in the second century, believers differed from surrounding Greco-Roman and even Jewish cultures. In particular, the Christian's view on dying was "governed more by hope than hopeless despair."⁴⁵

Whether death came naturally or by extreme persecution, Christian treatment of their loved one's death differed substantially precisely because of the hope they had in Christ. As Mutie outlines, unique Christian practices of burying their dead included closing of the eyes as if to picture a restful sleep, the dead believer being placed in a coffin rather than cremated, and the prohibition of outlandish wailings and mourning customary to Jews and pagans. The idea behind the Christian treatment of their dead, as opposed to strict Jewish and pagan cultures, was always to symbolize the hope of the believer's resurrection founded upon Jesus's death and resurrection.⁴⁶ For Christians, though there be suffering, there will equally be hope and glory.

The Johannine witness is that followers of Jesus in any age are to testify about Christ while expecting affliction from a world who hates them. They do so knowing that such hatred is really directed toward their Lord.⁴⁷ This does not mean that a Christian's faith in Jesus is somehow inauthentic if that believer is lacking the extremities of suffering highlighted in this article. Clearly, not everyone will experience martyrdom or intense forms of trauma because of their faith in Jesus. However, all believers are sure to feel that ancient tension of living for Jesus in a world that hates Him along with "various kinds" of struggles that come as a result (John 15:18–19; cf. James 1:2–3). As the narrative promises persecution to the group as a whole, no individual Christian should think he suffers persecution alone. It is an affliction experienced by the church locking arms since Jesus's first promises of it in the Upper Room narrative of John 14–16.

⁴² Hill, "Culture," 267.

⁴³ Statistics are available from Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/>, and Voice of the Martyrs, <https://www.persecution.com/>. The latter is an example of a ministry serving the worldwide persecuted church.

⁴⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger with Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 590.

⁴⁵ Jeremiah Mutie, *Death in Second Century Christian Thought: The Meaning of Death in Earliest Christianity* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 173.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 156–190.

⁴⁷ See Christopher M. Blumhofer, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel*, SNTSMS 177 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 194–204.

Just as Jesus suffered for God's glory, so do those who suffer for His name's sake (15:21). "To follow Jesus," Paul Anderson explains, "is not to escape persecution or even premature death. Just as the 'exaltation' of the cross was Jesus' paradoxical glorification, so will abiding in this knowledge be existential 'nourishment' for disciples undergoing hardship for the sake of their faith."⁴⁸ This is "righteous suffering," according to the FG. It is suffering promised to the collective group symbolizing the Christian church and is designed to reveal the glory of God through the world's worst tribulations. Such is the natural result for those who have exchanged their life and death for Christ's life and death.

Conclusion

This article has argued that a progression of "righteous suffering" exists in the history and literature of God's people and even serves to underscore differing economies between them. The theme was demonstrated to begin with believers suffering for their covenant infidelity in the OT, developed into Second Temple Judaism with assumed suffering while expecting a future reversal, to the NT explicitly promising suffering as a direct consequent for one's faith in God. Finally, a future age is anticipated through each of the transitions where there will no longer be suffering for God's people. Therefore, suffering as a promised consequent for faith in God (through Christ) in the present—as highlighted in John 15—is a feature reserved exclusively for the current Christian era. Such righteous suffering serves as a dramatic avenue for disciples to glorify Christ who suffered on their behalf.

⁴⁸ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: With a New Introduction, Outlines, and Epilogue* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 259.