

The Suffering of Israel

by John F. Walvoord

The predicted suffering of Israel is a result of Satan's opposition and God's discipline, but ultimately leads to their refinement and deliverance through the return of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:25, Jeremiah 30:5, Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24:15, Romans 11:25

Topics: "Israel's Suffering", "Divine Discipline"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the predicted suffering of Israel as a major aspect of Biblical prophecy, highlighting the paradox of a chosen nation destined for suffering due to divine purpose conflicting with satanic opposition. The causes of Israel's suffering stem from spiritual warfare, incomplete obedience, delayed fulfillments, and satanic opposition throughout history. Despite Israel's failures and divine discipline, their sufferings demonstrate God's discipline, righteousness, and love, leading to a future time of Jacob's trouble and ultimate deliverance from suffering through the coming of the Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

Transcript

The predicted suffering of Israel is one of the major aspects of Biblical prophecy concerning the future of this people. It is paradoxical that the nation chosen for exaltation and selected to be a special means of divine revelation should also be destined for suffering which would exceed that of any other nation of the world.

Causes Of Israel's Suffering

The trials of Israel stem from the basic conflict between divine purpose and satanic opposition. The very fact that God selected Israel as a special means of divine revelation makes the nation the object of special satanic attack. Satanic hatred of the seed of Abraham is manifested from the beginning of God's dealings with Abraham and continues through the entire course of human history culminating in the rebellion at the end of the millennium.

Spiritual warfare in relation to Israel is in evidence from the beginning. The fulfillment of God's purpose of bringing Abraham from Ur of Chaldees to the Promised Land was delayed and thwarted by Abraham's incomplete obedience in bringing his father and nephew Lot with him. Entrance to the land was delayed until his father died, and Lot continued to be a hindrance to him until he and Abraham separated. Satanic opposition to fulfillment of God's purpose in Abraham is also revealed in the delayed birth of Isaac, and

only the miraculous intervention of God made it possible for Him to fulfill His prophecy of a seed to Abraham through whom He would bless the nations. In the case of Isaac, a similar situation is evident in the fact that only after years of supplication was a seed granted to Isaac and Rebekah. When Jacob and Esau were born, it was expressly an answer to prayer. The corrupting influence of Satan is manifest in both the lives of Esau and Jacob, and only by the grace of God was Jacob rescued from his compromising position. Jacob's life ended in Egypt, to which he had fled to avoid the famine, with none of his family remaining in the Promised Land. The subsequent experience of Israel in Egypt, where for a time they enjoyed prosperity but eventually were threatened with extermination, is well known to every student of the Bible. Only by divine intervention was Israel brought from Egypt to the Promised Land, and then only after years of failure and wandering in the wilderness.

The incomplete possession of the land, the spiritual degeneracy which characterized the time of the judges, and the apostasy that followed the days of Solomon are given large place in the Old Testament. In every particular Satan sought to spoil, to hinder, and to mar the purpose of God in the elect nation. The scattering of Israel in the captivities, the attempt recorded in the book of Esther to exterminate the Jew, and the ultimate capstone of satanic opposition to Israel's place of spiritual leadership was recorded in the gospels. In the New Testament, Israel's rejection of her Messiah is related, with Israel's resulting dispersion following the Roman persecution A.D. 70-135. Undoubtedly one of the principal causes for Israel's suffering has been the unending opposition of Satan to the fulfillment of God's purpose in the nation.

Coupled with Israel's failures as recorded in the Scriptures is the fact of divine discipline exercised on the nation. Israel was not only to be the channel of divine revelation of God, but also the example of God's faithfulness to a sinning people who are the objects of His love and grace. Accordingly, many pages of the Old Testament are dedicated to giving the sacred records of God's dealings with His wandering people. The studies of Israel's sufferings will illustrate this basic reason for the sufferings inflicted on the nation.

The sufferings of Israel, while revealing God's discipline and righteousness, are also demonstrations of His love. Joined to every righteous judgment upon Israel are many manifestations of divine grace in preserving a godly remnant, in giving them that which is far greater than they deserved and fulfilling His divine purpose in and through them in spite of their own failure and Satan's efforts to hinder the purpose of God. There is a majestic drama in the whole sequence of events that relate to Israel's history, and they epitomize to some extent the conflict between good and evil which is the basic Christian philosophy of history. The sufferings of Israel, therefore, should be seen in the context of satanic persecution, of divine discipline for sin, and of divine faithfulness to His chosen people.

The Suffering Of Israel In Fulfilled Prophecy

Early in the recorded history of Israel intimations are given of the fact that Israel would suffer. Moses solemnly warned the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 4:25-28 that God would bring them into suffering for their sins: "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have been long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image in the form of anything, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah thy God, to provoke him to anger; I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over the Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And Jehovah will scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations, whither Jehovah shall lead you away. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see,

nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."

In the verses which immediately follow, however, hope is held out to Israel that if they will seek the face of God they will find forgiveness and restoration. In Deuteronomy 4:29, 30 Moses assured them: "But from thence ye shall seek Jehovah thy God, and thou shalt find him, when thou searchest after him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice."

Important in this promise of restoration is the first reference to a time of special tribulation in the latter days which will be related to their return to their ancient land. This seems to be a reference to events which are yet future, connected with God's dealings with Israel in the time of trouble preceding the millennial kingdom.

One of the major sections in the Bible on Israel's sufferings is found in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy. After outlining the basis for blessing while they were in the land (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), Moses turns to the subject of God's chastening discipline upon them if they depart from His law. He points out that God will curse them and He will smite them with all types of afflictions and that ultimately they will be scattered over the face of the earth.

The closing verses of Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 62, are a graphic description of God's future discipline of the nation. Moses writes: "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou didst not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God. And it shall come to pass, that, as Jehovah rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you, so Jehovah will rejoice over you to cause you to perish, and to destroy you; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest in to possess it. And Jehovah will scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot: but Jehovah will give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and pining of soul; and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear night and day, and shalt have no assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would it were morning: for the fear of thy heart which thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Deuteronomy 28:62-67).

In this massive prediction of Israel's future sufferings, God makes plain that Israel will be left few in number, they will be scattered among all the nations of the earth, and they will have no rest of mind or heart, their very lives being in danger from morning until evening. The fearful consequences of neglecting the law have been only too graphically fulfilled in the history of the nation.

Recorded in the Old Testament itself are the captivities which were a major form of suffering for Israel. The ten tribes were carried off by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C. This was followed by the captivity of Babylon in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Once again the land lay desolate, the beautiful city of Jerusalem was in ruins, and the evidences of God's loving favor were in a large measure erased. The divine judgment came only after centuries of warning not only in the written Word, but the oral ministry of prophets who plainly told the children of Israel of that which would beset them if they did not return to the Lord. The Old Testament, however, closes with Israel back in the land, re-established in their ancient cities, and once again worshipping at the temple of God.

In the New Testament after the four hundred years which separate the Old and New Testaments, the strain of prophecy concerning Israel's future sufferings is continued. With the gathering opposition of the religious leaders of the Jews as well as widespread defection among those who had originally followed Christ, the closing messages of Christ were messages of judgment. In the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, Christ solemnly pronounces divine judgment upon the scribes and the Pharisees: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are the sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:29-39).

In pronouncing judgment upon His generation, Christ was in effect predicting the final dispersion and their ultimate regathering when the godly remnant of Israel in repentance would say: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." In the early portion of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew the postscript to this prediction is given. When the disciples came to show Christ the splendor of the buildings of the temple, Christ answered: "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). In reply to further questions from His disciples, He predicted the course of the present age including the dramatic prediction of Matthew 24:9: "Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake." Like Moses of old, He solemnly warned the children of Israel. Christ, the prophet of whom Moses spoke, delivered a similar message to His generation much of which has already been fulfilled in the centuries since Christ. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed and with it the magnificent temple. In the years that followed, Israel was the object of fearful persecution, culminating with the complete desecration of the land of Israel in A.D. 135 by the Roman soldiers. The sad condition of being scattered to the ends of the earth has persisted until the twentieth century, and with it has come untold sufferings to the people of Israel climaxing in the terrible scourge of Hitler who murdered some six million of the people of Israel. But, according to the prophets, the end is not yet and ahead of Israel is a terrible time of suffering before the day of restoration.

The Future Time Of Jacob's Trouble

The predictions of Israel's suffering as given in the Old and New Testaments, while fulfilled in part to the present hour, are yet to have their climax. As intimated as early as Deuteronomy 4, Israel is destined to have a particular time of suffering which will eclipse anything that it has known in the past. The Prophet Jeremiah gave an extensive revelation on this subject in the thirtieth chapter of his prophecy in connection with his prediction of the ultimate restoration of the people of Israel. A tragic picture of that future hour is given in Jeremiah 30:5-7: "For thus saith Jehovah: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child: wherefore do I see every man with his

hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it."

In Jeremiah's prophecy the main elements of Israel's future time of tribulation are unfolded. It is declared to be a time of great trouble which will be greater than any time of suffering in Israel's past. It will be peculiarly "the time of Jacob's trouble" in that Israel will be singled out for suffering in that day. Yet coupled with the prediction of unprecedented tribulation is the prediction that "he shall be saved out of it." The time of trouble is going to be climaxed by a time of deliverance when the prophecy given in Jeremiah 30:3 is fulfilled: "For, lo, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will turn again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith Jehovah; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it."

The Prophet Daniel in a similar way refers to Israel's time of trouble. After predicting the warfare which will characterize the Middle East at the time of the end, Daniel goes on to prophesy: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1). Like the prophecy of Jeremiah, Daniel predicted that the future time of Israel's tribulation would surpass anything they had ever known and that it would be climaxed by their deliverance.

The purge of Israel in their time of trouble is described by Zechariah in these words: "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith Jehovah, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried" (Zechariah 13:8, 9). According to Zechariah's prophecy, two thirds of the children of Israel in the land will perish, but the one third that are left will be refined and be awaiting the deliverance of God at the second coming of Christ which is described in the next chapter of Zechariah.

On this same subject of Israel's coming time of suffering, Christ Himself delivered a dramatic prediction. In the course of His prophetic message in Matthew 24, He instructed the disciples: "When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be a great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved, but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:15-22).

In this passage Christ introduces the fact that the time of the great tribulation is going to be that of which Daniel the Prophet spoke in connection with his reference to the abomination of desolation. It seems clear that Christ had in mind the prediction of the climax of Israel's seventieth week or seventy sevens of years mentioned in Daniel 9:27. Here many expositors understand the passage to teach that the prince that shall come, the future Roman dictator mentioned in Daniel 9:26, will make a covenant with Israel for a period of seven years. This covenant, after running half its course, is broken in the middle of the seven years and Israel, instead of being a protected nation, becomes the object of fearful persecution.

We read of this in Daniel 9:27 in these words: "And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate; and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate." Further light on this abomination of desolation is given in Daniel 12:11 where it is predicted: "And from the time that the continual burnt-offering shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." This apparently is a reference to the breaking of the covenant, the stopping of Jewish sacrifices, and the erection of an idol representing the prince that shall come who will become a world ruler.

In commenting on Daniel's prophecy, Christ exhorts those who are living in the day of its fulfillment in Judea to flee to the mountains, not bothering to get their ordinary possessions. It will be a time of special trial to those with small children and their flight will be made doubly difficult if it occurs in the winter, or in inclement weather, or on the Sabbath day when journeys are usually avoided and would therefore be conspicuous. Christ sums it up in Matthew 24:21, 22, in words that are reminiscent of Jeremiah and Daniel. He predicts that this period will be a time of great tribulation without parallel since the beginning of the world and will never be followed by a period of equal severity. He goes beyond the prophecies of Daniel and Jeremiah in His statement in verse 22: "And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved." In other words, the trials and difficulties of that day would be so severe that it would exterminate the entire human race if it were not for the fact that they are cut short by the return of Jesus Christ in power and glory to establish His kingdom. This future time of great tribulation is to be climactic in Israel's experience of suffering and is to be the final purging before God Himself interposes the judgments which begin the millennial kingdom.

The significance of Christ's statement that all flesh would perish unless the period were cut short is borne out by a study of this same period afforded in the book of the Revelation. Even a casual study of the description of the time of trouble which will characterize the end of the age will reveal a time of unprecedented difficulty.

As held by many expositors, the chronological structure of the book of Revelation is supplied by the sequence of seven seals affixed to the scroll in the possession of the Lamb. As each seal is broken, it unfolds a new period in the order of end-time events. The seventh seal is a comprehensive one, apparently including in its scope the details provided in the seven trumpets which subsequently sound and including the events described as the outpouring of seven bowls of the wrath of God which is related to the seventh trumpet.

The scene of devastation of divine judgment and human iniquity which is unfolded in these events is without parallel in the history of the world. According to Revelation 6:7, the judgments attending the opening of the fourth seal involve the death with sword, famine, and wild beasts of one fourth of the earth's population. If this were applied to the present world population now approaching three billion, it would mean that 750,000,000 people would perish, more than the total population of North America, Central America, and South America combined. It seems clear that this is only one of a series of gigantic catastrophes. In the judgments described as following the trumpets of the angels, a third part of the remaining population of the world is described as destroyed in Revelation 9:15. The concluding judgment proceeding from the seventh bowl of the wrath of God poured out on the earth in Revelation 16:17-21 is even more devastating than anything that had occurred previously. The stark reality of the words of Christ that the entire race would be blotted out if that period were not terminated by His return seems to be

supported by these details.

Though the judgments will obviously fall on all races and people, it seems that Israel is to be the special object of satanic hatred. This is borne out in the prophecy concerning the woman with child in Revelation 12. The best explanation of this symbolic presentation is that the woman is Israel and the child is the Lord Jesus Christ. The dragon, representing Satan, is portrayed as being cast down to the earth in Revelation 12:13 and, realizing that his time is short, according to the Scripture, "he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child" (Revelation 12:13). The Scriptures which follow indicate the unrelenting warfare against the woman and her seed and only by divine intervention is partial protection afforded her.

Out of the total number of Israel, a representative group of 144,000 are sealed and thereby protected from destruction in this period. In Revelation 7, they are enumerated with their respective tribes. In Revelation 14, they are depicted on Mount Zion with the Lamb at the close of the tribulation, still intact and singing praises to the Lord. They form therefore the core of the godly remnant which will be awaiting Christ when He returns to set up His millennial kingdom.

Israel's Deliverance From Suffering

Just as the Scriptures faithfully portray the fact of Israel's suffering climaxing in the great tribulation, the Word of God also promises deliverance at its close. This was noted in all the great passages dealing with the subject, as in Deuteronomy 4, Jeremiah 30, Daniel 12, and Matthew 24. Of special importance is the prediction given by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:25-27: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: and this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." In this passage it is predicted that the present age of fullness of blessings for the Gentiles will pass and be succeeded by a restoration to Israel. At that time Israel will be delivered, as indicated in the words: "And so all Israel shall be saved."

Though the meaning of this passage has been debated, probably the best interpretation is to regard it as a national promise, namely, that at the time of the end when her period of suffering has been fulfilled, Israel as a nation or Israel as a whole shall be delivered from her enemies. The salvation in view is not that of freedom from the guilt of sin, but deliverance from persecution and trial. This will be accomplished when the Deliverer comes out of Zion, an unmistakable reference to Jesus Christ. When He returns, He will come to the Mount of Olives. As depicted in Zechariah 14:4, He will establish His government in Jerusalem and from Zion will go forth the law. According to Isaiah 2:3: "And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." At that time God's covenant of blessing upon Israel will be fulfilled as embodied in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and mercy will be shown the people of Israel instead of the searching judgments of the tribulation period which have preceded.

In contemplating this tremendous revelation of God's divine purpose and plan for Israel, the Apostle Paul breaks forth in a doxology: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen"

(Romans 11:33-36).

Summary

The important world events which are taking place today may be regarded as a prelude to the consummation which will include Israel's time of suffering. Heart-rending as it may be to contemplate, the people of Israel who are returning to their ancient land are placing themselves within the vortex of this future whirlwind which will destroy the majority of those living in the land of Palestine. The searching and refining fire of divine judgment will produce in Israel that which is not there now, an attitude of true repentance and eager anticipation of the coming of their Messiah. The tribulation period will then be followed by Israel's day of glory.

For the Christian these events are of utmost significance, for many Scriptures seem to teach that Christ will come for the church, the body of saints, in this present age of grace, before these end-time events take place. Israel's day of suffering will be preceded by the translation of the church and the resurrection of the dead in Christ. The swiftly moving events of our generation are not a basis for despair, but another reminder that God majestically fulfills His will. Every prophecy will find its counterpart in complete fulfillment, and the wisdom and mercy and sovereignty of God will be vindicated before all His creatures. Christ is not only the hope of Israel, but also the hope of all those who are trusting Him.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/the-suffering-of-israel/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net