



# The Bible and **PERSECUTION**

---

A 4-Week Study



**A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERSECUTION: FOUR SMALL GROUP STUDIES**  
**BY VICTOR MORRIS**

Copyright © 2018 Advancing Native Missions

<b>LESSON 1: UNDERSTANDING PERSECUTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>LESSON 2: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PERSECUTION?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>LESSON 3: HOW DO THE PERSECUTED RESPOND?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>LESSON 4: WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CONCLUSION: PERSECUTION OF CHRIST'S BODY</b>	<b>24</b>

# CONTENTS



# LESSON 1: UNDERSTANDING PERSECUTION

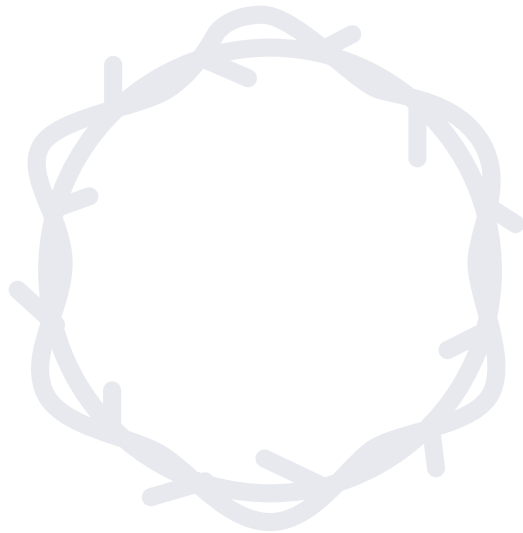
## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “PERSECUTION?”

The Greek word for persecute, *dioko* (διώκω) literally means “to pursue, to put to flight, or to chase after.” In a positive sense, it can mean to eagerly pursue or seek after something—for example as in 1 Timothy 6:11 where we are to “pursue righteousness.” However, in a negative sense it means to pursue with an intent to harm. Thus, by implication it means “to harass, to hunt down, to molest, to cause trouble, to oppress”—hence, to persecute.

**What thoughts or feelings come to your mind when you hear the word “persecution?” Define persecution in your own words. Explain how you understand persecution.**

**Read Matthew 5:10–12.**

**Jesus says the persecuted are blessed. Does this idea surprise you? How?**



**What do you think Christ's attitude is toward persecution?**

**Why do you think persecution is such a common theme in the New Testament?**

**What are the results of persecution?**

**Does understanding that many of the books of the New Testament were written from prison make you think about their messages in a different way? How? Give examples.**

## **PERSECUTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

Persecution and suffering is one of the themes that runs as an undercurrent throughout the Bible. The word *dioko* (persecution) occurs 45 times in the New Testament in one form or another. Entire books of the New Testament were written to those being persecuted: Hebrews, Philippians, and 1 Peter among them. Many of Paul's letters were written from prison, where he was confined because of his gospel preaching: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. John received the Revelation while banished to Patmos, essentially an island prison colony.

It is also important to remember that many of the most prominent Christians in the early church suffered great persecution and martyrdom. Stephen, the deacon, was the first. He was followed by James, the brother of John the Beloved. Church tradition says that all of the twelve Apostles were martyred, except for John, and their deaths were cruel and horribly painful. Other early church figures who were martyred include Mark, Barnabas, James (the Lord's brother) and Paul.

Think about how many believers in church history suffered for their faith. How does this impact your own spiritual walk?

Based on this verse, would you say persecution is common or unusual?

### **IS PERSECUTION COMMON?**

Do you think that persecution is common or rare in the history of the church? What is your reason for saying this?

Also consider Hebrews 10:33 in this regard. What do we learn from this verse?

Read 2 Timothy 3:12.  
What does Paul say about persecution?

Do you think Christians in America and the West are persecuted? If so, in what ways?

**Read the following passages: Luke 11:48–50; Luke 21:12; and Matthew 10:16–26. Did Jesus anticipate that His followers would be persecuted?**

**What specifically did Jesus predict would happen to His followers?**

**Is suffering and hardship an odd or unusual thing for the Christian? Why or why not.**

**Read 1 Peter 4:12. What was Peter’s perspective on this matter? Read John 5:16 and Matthew 16:21.**

**Was Jesus persecuted while He was here on earth? In what ways? Give specific examples of Christ being persecuted.**

**How should Christian believers view suffering for their faith based on John 15:20? What lessons do you learn about suffering and persecution from the example of Jesus? Why do you think persecution is not more common in America and in the West?**

## **EXTRA STUDY: PERSECUTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

While this study primarily focuses on what the New Testament says about persecution, the Old Testament certainly also presents a number of examples of God's servants being pursued and mistreated because of their righteous stand for God (cf. Matthew 23:29–36). Think about a few examples from the Old Testament. For each one, consider in what ways they were mistreated and persecuted. Also, what lessons can we learn about suffering from their examples?

Elijah: 1 Kings 19:1–3

Micaiah: 1 Kings 22

Hanani the Seer: 2Chronicles16:7–10

Zechariah, son of Jehoiada: 2 Chronicles 24:17–22

Uriah: Jeremiah 26:20–23

Jeremiah: Jeremiah 20:1–2; chapters 32, 37, and 38

John the Baptist: John served as a bridge between the Old Testament prophetic tradition and the coming New Covenant of Messiah. For exposing the sin of King Herod, he was imprisoned and then beheaded (Matthew 14:3–12).





## LESSON 2: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PERSECUTION?

Many ask, “Why would God allow His children to be persecuted?” The question seems reasonable. Yet the Bible gives us several illustrations of God using persecution to accomplish something good for His people.

### **FELLOWSHIP**

Read **Philippians 3:10**. In what ways does persecution foster fellowship with the Lord?

Why do you think Paul would actually desire to share in Christ’s sufferings?



Read Colossians 1:24 and Romans 8:17. What do we learn about suffering and our relationship with Christ from these verses?

## **WITNESS**

Consider 2 Corinthians 4:8–10.

In what ways did Paul suffer for the Lord?

Paul says that he suffered so that “so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” What do you think this means? How is Christ’s life made known through our suffering?

In what ways is our suffering an effective way to testify to the truth of our faith?

## **BLESSING**

Discuss Matthew 5:10.

What does it mean to be “blessed”?

How can persecution result in blessing for us?

Consider 1 Peter 3:14 and 4:14 in this regard.

What do we learn from these verses?

Read Philippians 1:29.

Do you think of persecution as a “gift” from God? In what way could it be seen a gift?

How does this verse affect your understanding of persecution?

Also consider Acts 5:41.

If you were being persecuted for your faith, would you consider it something that God has “granted” to you, given as a gift of His grace? How do you respond to this verse?

## **DEMONSTRATION OF JUSTICE**

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6.

What is God’s ultimate response to those who persecute His followers?

How does this demonstrate the justice of God?

**Consider Revelation 6:9–11.**

**What is the expectation of the martyrs in heaven?**

**What do you think about the prayer of the martyrs in this passage?**

## **TO GLORIFY GOD**

**Consider the words of 1 Peter 4:12–16, written to persecuted Christians. According to Peter, is suffering for the faith an unusual or odd thing?**

**What instructions are given to believers about how they should handle persecution?**

**In what ways is God glorified through persecution?**

## **TO GLORIFY SAINTS**

Consider Luke 24:46; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 1:11.

In what ways did suffering lead to Christ being glorified?

How does Christ's example apply to our lives?

Read Romans 8:17.

According to this verse, what precedes our glorification in Christ?

How does this make you feel? Does this change your perception of suffering for Christ?

## **TO REWARD**

Consider the following verses: Matthew 5:12 and Revelation 2:10.

What is promised to those who suffer for Christ?

What does this tell us about the character of God?

**Read 2 Timothy 2:12.**

**What do you think this verse means?**

**How does it apply to your life?**

## **EXTRA STUDY: WHY ARE BELIEVERS PERSECUTED?**

The Bible indicates several direct causes of the persecution of believers. Read through the material below about these causes. If doing this as a group, take time to discuss these reasons and interact with the Bible passages together. If doing this individually, meditate and pray over this material.

## **THE WORD**

Persecution often results from the proclamation of God's Word. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus comments that "persecution comes because of the word" (Matthew 13:21; cf. John 8:37). We see this in the Old Testament when the prophets of God suffered because of their declaration of truth against sinful people. We also see this in the life of Stephen in Acts 7. It was his confrontation of the Jewish rulers and his proclamation of God's Word that resulted in his death.

One aspect of the gospel that may especially result in persecution is the preaching of the cross. That is to say, to declare that salvation is only found through the atoning work of Christ is offensive to some and may result in the persecution of believers. Note Galatians 6:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 in this regard.

## **THE NAME**

Believers may also suffer persecution because of their identification with the person of Christ Himself. For example, in Acts 5:41 the Apostles rejoiced because they were "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." Consider these verses also: Matthew 24:9 and Acts 9:16.

## **A DIFFERENT LIFESTYLE**

As believers, our values, behavior, thinking, perspectives, and lifestyle all mark us as different (cf. 1 John 4:4–6). And this difference causes animosity, and even hatred, on the part of the people of this world. See John 15:18–19 and 1 Peter 4:3–4.



## LESSON 3: HOW DO THE PERSECUTED RESPOND?

Christians all around the world suffer mistreatment because of their faith. This may range from discrimination and prejudicial attitudes to oppression and violence, even death. In the West we may not often suffer as severely as in some other areas (although it does happen), yet persecution still may occur. Whether a Christian faces imprisonment and death, or slander and bigotry, how do they respond?

### AS HOPEFUL WITNESSES

God can use persecution as a testimony to the power of the gospel message. We must remember that our word “martyr” is actually derived from the Greek word *martus* (μάρτυς) which means “witness.” The early church applied this term to those who suffered and died for their faith because their deaths were such a powerful testimony for the gospel.

If we suffer for Christ, how can we maintain a faithful witness? Read each of the verses that follow and describe what a faithful, suffering witness looks like:

- Matthew 10:28
- Acts 20:24
- Revelation 12:11
- 1 Peter 4:16
- Revelation 2:13



## **ENDURING THE PERSECUTION**

Read 1 Corinthians 4:12.

According to this verse, how does a Christian respond to mistreatment?

What do you think the behavior and attitude of a believer should look like while enduring persecution?

Consider 2 Corinthians 4:9 and James 5:10–11.

What do we learn about enduring suffering in these verses?

## **MOVING ON**

What does Jesus teach us about responding to persecution in Matthew 10:23?

Do you think this displays cowardice or lack of faith? Why or why not?

What example do we see in the life of Paul, for example, in Acts 14:5–7?



## **LOOKING UP**

To suffer persecution as a faithful Christian requires having a different perspective from the people of the world. We see things differently and act differently. What do these verses teach us about our perspective when mistreated?

- Hebrews 10:34
- Romans 8:18

## **LOVING THE PERSECUTORS**

When persecuted, Christians should demonstrate a very different, and somewhat unexpected, attitude toward the persecutors. Describe that attitude based on these verses:

- Matthew 5:44
- Romans 12:14

## **ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE**

It must be understood that persecution is not a sign of divine displeasure. It is not punishment. To the contrary, to suffer for Christ may be viewed as an honor that God bestows on His people (see Acts 5:41). What do the following verses teach us about God's love for us, even when we are mistreated?

- Romans 8:35
- 2 Corinthians 4:9

## **TRUSTING GOD**

When we are persecuted or oppressed it may be a challenge to understand what is happening. Consequently, we may question the faithfulness of God. But is this appropriate?

Do you think we should trust God despite persecution and mistreatment? Why or why not?

## **COMING TOGETHER**

**Read 1 Peter 4:19.**

**To whom is Peter talking?**

**How does he describe God to these people?**

**What does Peter say we should do when we suffer?**

**How can we really do this?**

**Consider Hebrews 13:3.**

**What is God's expectation of us, as commanded in this verse?**

**What are practical ways we can unite ourselves with the persecuted church?**

**Do you think we obey the command in Hebrews 13:3 very well? Why or why not?**

**Read Romans 12:15 and 1 Corinthians 12:26.**

**What do you think God is saying to you in these verses?**

## EXTRA STUDY: IN WHAT WAYS DOES PERSECUTION OCCUR?

Persecution can come in many different forms. Take some time to consider these.

The New Testament describes a wide variety of ways in which Christians suffer for their faith. Read the following verses, and either meditate (individually) or comment (as a group) on them.

- They are publicly insulted and humiliated (Hebrews 10:33).
- Evil things are said about them (Matthew 5:11).
- They are defamed as “evildoers” (1 Peter 3:14).
- They are betrayed, even by family (Matthew 10:21).
- They are brought to interrogation and trial (Matthew 10:17–20).
- Restrictions are placed upon their ministry (Acts 5:28; 5:40).
- They are forced to flee (Acts 8:1; 11:19).
- They are arrested and imprisoned (Acts 4:3–22; 5:17–42; 16:23ff, etc.)
- They are flogged (Acts 5:40; 16:23; 2 Corinthians 11:24).
- They are stoned (Acts 14:19).
- They are hated by the people of the world (Matthew 10:22; 24:9)
- They are killed (Acts 7:57–60; 12:1–5).

**What are some ways in which persecution occurs today?**

**Can you cite specific examples?**



## LESSON 4: WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

In the last lesson we looked at Hebrews 13:3. Let's now discuss it in more depth.

### HEBREWS 13:3

Read Hebrews 13:3 in your group.

How do you react to this verse? What thoughts or feelings come to you?

Restate this verse in your own words. (Have people in the group do this by writing in the blank space that follows. Then have several read their paraphrase to the group.)

How well do you think we do in obeying this verse?



**How can we do better?**

The Greek word for “remember” in this verse is very interesting. It doesn’t mean just to recall something. Rather, it means to actively and intentionally remind ourselves of something. It requires a high level of personal involvement and personal attention to be given to a thing.

**Thinking about this, how should we “remember” those who are suffering?**

**What are practical ways we can intentionally and actively remember the persecuted?**

**Ask yourself: “How am I intentionally and personally remembering the persecuted?”**

## **THE BODY OF CHRIST**

**One of the common images of the church in the New Testament is that of a human body. Why do you think the New Testament writers used this image for the church?**

**In what way does the image of a body apply to our response toward the persecuted church?**

**Read each of the following verses. For each verse ask this question: what does this say to me personally about the persecuted church, and what I am expected to do?**

- 1 Corinthians 12:25–27
- Hebrews 10:34
- Romans 12:14–16
- Philippians 2:1–5
- Matthew 25:36

# CONCLUSION: PERSECUTION OF CHRIST'S BODY

When Saul of Tarsus was confronted with the living Christ on the road to Damascus, Jesus asked him a very telling question, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul thought he was simply ridding Judaism of an obnoxious, heretical sect. What he did not realize was that he was pursuing the very people of God, the followers of Messiah. And by persecuting them, he was persecuting the body of the Messiah, and thus persecuting Messiah Himself.

God in His sovereign love, grace, and knowledge allows, and even ordains persecution for His children. Yet this is not a light thing. For the Lord, it is a personal matter. Those who suffer oppression are His sheep, His children, His body. He will never forget their suffering. Neither must we (Hebrews 13:3).

As a conclusion to this series of small group studies, think about these two questions:

- What will this group do to remember the persecuted church, and to be engaged with them in their suffering?

- What will I personally do to obey Hebrews 13:3 and to show love and compassion for those who are suffering for Christ?

## TAKE ACTION!

There are multiple ways groups or individuals can "remember" and become involved with the persecuted. Advancing Native Missions offers a number of resources for this purpose.

## RESOURCES

Additional resources available from Advancing Native Missions:

- Transformed by Pain by Brother K
- Danger and Deliverance by Brother K
- Voices in the Wilderness by Douglas Hsu
- Our e-book titled, What Does the Bible Say about Persecution?

To learn more about how you can help Christians around the world spreading the good news of Jesus in the midst of great persecution, visit [advancingnativemissions.com/persecuted/](http://advancingnativemissions.com/persecuted/)

