
a *Grace Notes* course

ACTS 200

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 201: **Acts 8:1-8**

ACTS, Lesson 201, Acts 8:1-8

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Acts 8:1-8**Acts 8:1**

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The first clause should be the concluding verse of chapter 7. The Vulgate (Latin) version, and several other versions, have it that way. Chapter 8 begins with the account of the great persecution.

Consenting

suneudokwn – “to be willing; to approve with glad consent; with pleasure” Paul had great zeal for the death of Stephen and for the persecution that was brought against the Christians in the time that followed. Paul was confident that he served God by putting Christians to death, putting them in prison, and otherwise harassing them. Paul is not merely standing by here, he is enthusiastically and actively helping with the murder of Stephen.

death

ajnairesei – “murder; death”, literally, “to take up and carry away.” A very interesting use of this idiom for death, especially as Stephen had seen into heaven just before his death, and was now being taken immediately into the presence of the Father.

great persecution**diwgmo~ mega~**

It was against the church in Jerusalem, which is no sooner planted than it is persecuted. Christ often taught that tribulation and persecution would arise because of the Word. And Christ had particularly foretold that Jerusalem would soon be made dangerous for his followers, for that city had been famous for killing the prophets and stoning those that were sent to it, Matthew 23:37.

In this persecution many were put to death, for Paul states that at this time he “persecuted this way [Christianity] unto the death,” (Acts 21:4): and

that when they were put to death he gave his voice against them (Acts 26:10).” ¹

According to some accounts, though they cannot be depended on, two thousand persons suffered at this time: and if this was the case, it would certainly qualify as a great persecution.

scattered abroad

3rd person plural, aorist passive indicative of **diaspeirw** “to scatter; to disperse” The *passive* voice indicates that the people did not scatter themselves, but that they were scattered by other people, namely, by those who were persecuting them.

Those who were scattered were the preachers of the word; this does not speak of all believers being scattered at this time. “Not all the members of the church [were scattered], nor perhaps any of the private ones; for we afterwards read of devout men that carried Stephen to his grave; and of the church being made havoc of by Saul; and of men and women being haled out of their houses, and committed to prison by him; but all the preachers of the word [were scattered], except the apostles; for they that were scattered went about preaching the word, (Acts 8:4, 11:19) Among these were Philip, who went to Samaria; Ananias, who was at Damascus; and others that went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch.” ²

except the apostles.

The apostles continued in Jerusalem, to found and organize the infant Church. This is an indication of their great courage in the face of threats of imprisonment and death, a courage which they showed all the rest of their lives.

Acts 8:2

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

The men who buried Stephen were members of the Christian community. They prepared Stephen’s

¹ Henry, Matthew, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

² Gill, John, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

body for burial and took it to a place of burial, *in contradiction of established Sanhedrin policy.*

Below are some comments from the Talmud about the handling of the bodies of condemned people (although keep in mind that Stephen was not legally condemned; he was murdered by a furious mob.)

From the Talmud, “they did not bury one that was stoned in the sepulchers of his fathers, but there were two burying places appointed by the sanhedrim, one for those that are stoned and burnt, and another for those that are slain with the sword and strangled.”

According to the Tract Sanhedrin, Folio 45 and 46, the stone wherewith any one was stoned, the post on which he was hanged, the sword by which he was beheaded, and the cord by which he was strangled, were buried in the same place with the bodies of the executed persons. As these persons died under the curse of the law, the instruments by which they were put to death were considered as unclean and accursed, and therefore buried with their bodies.

So the men who buried Stephen were quite courageous and resolute, who would not allow Stephen to be buried in a common place like a criminal.

carried (to his burial)

sugkomizw “to collect; to bring together.” In the King James version, the words “to his burial” are italicized, indicating that the translators added these words to make the meaning clear. There are many instances of this word in the Papyri.

From *Catalog of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, UK*:

**sunkomisamenos ta pleista meri th-
ekbasew~ tw n ejlafwn.** “having gathered the greater part of the produce of the fields”.³

Souter, in *Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Oxford Press, suggests that in Acts 8:2 the verb may not mean “to take up” or “carry,” but “get back,” or “recover”, so that the men who

cared for Stephen’s body had to recover it from the killing ground where he lay.⁴

The meaning “to get back” is also seen in another source from the first century AD: **monon diagrafw ta dhmosia mhden sunkomizomeno~**, “only I continue paying the public taxes without getting back anything in return.”⁵ (Sounds very modern for being 2000 years ago! wd)

lamentation

kopeto~, literally, “breast beating”, thus an idiom for grievous mourning. Used quite often in the Septuagint: Gen. 50:10; Esther 4:3; Psalm 30:11; Amos 5:16,17.

Acts 8:3

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.

Saul made havoc of the church

“Havoc” is from **lumainw** “to outrage; dishonor; devastate; ravage.” The word is used of ferocious animals, such as bears or wolves, who track down and kill their prey. This shows with what diligent and persevering hatred Saul pursued the innocent Christians.

From the time of Aeschylus. in the sense “to treat disgracefully,” then more generally “to do an injury,” “to hurt,” “to imperil” (e.g., the health of the body, the constitution of the state), “to destroy” (physically or morally), “to devastate” (places in war), “to treat infamously,” “to injure”.

In the Septuagint **λομαίνομαι** (cf. Dan. 6:23; 2 Chr. 16:10; Isa. 65:25). The meaning is “to destroy”, (Prov. 25:26), “to corrupt” or “to disfigure” “to shame” (Ezra. 16:25), “to annihilate”, often, as outside the Bible, with a suggestion of the arbitrary, irrational and wanton.

³ Moulton, James Hope and Milligan, George, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*

⁴ Moulton and Milligan

⁵ Moulton and Milligan

entering into every house

All houses were searched, to find any who were Christians. The world's recent history has graphic examples of this kind of terrible treatment of people; for example, the hounding, arresting, and murdering of Jews of many nations, by German Nazis in the 1930's and 40's, and the wholesale arrest and execution of dissidents in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

haling men and women

The word "haling," is very weak, in that it does not bring into English the violent capture of people that is indicated by the Greek. One "hails" a taxi, or a friend at a distance.

But the verb **surw** signifies dragging men and women before magistrates, or dragging them to justice, treating them in a violent manner.

cf. John 21:8, "Ane the other disciples came in a little boat (for they were not far from land, but as it were 200 cubits), dragging (**surw**) the net with fish."

cf. Rev. 12:3,4, "...and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew (**surw**) the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth..."

Saul, and other religious Jews, invaded Christian's homes at any time of the day or night and violently abducted men and women and took them off to prison to be tortured and murdered.

committed them = paradidomi – "to hand over; to give over"

prison = ful akh. This is widely used in Greek for "guard"

"The Romans alone had the power of life and death, the Sanhedrin, by whom Saul was employed (Acts 26:10; Gal. 1:13) could do no more than arrest and imprison, in order to inflict any punishment short of death. It is true, St. Paul himself says that some of them were put to death; but this was either done by Roman authority, or by what was called the judgment of zeal, i.e. when the mob took the execution of the laws into their own hands, and massacred those whom they pretended to be blasphemers of God: for these sanctified

their murderous outrage under the specious name of zeal for God's glory, and quoted the ensample of Phineas as a precedent. Such persons as these formed a sect among the Jews; and are known in ecclesiastical history by the appellation of Zealots or Sicarii." ⁶

"Saul, the principal agent, was young, zealous, learned, and clothed with power. He showed afterward that he had talents suited for any station, and zeal that tired with no exertion, and that was appalled by no obstacle. With this talent and this zeal he entered on his work. The Christians were few and feeble. They were scattered and unarmed. They were unprotected by any civil power, and exposed, therefore, to the full blaze and rage of persecution. That the church was not destroyed was owing to the protection of God a protection which not only secured its existence, but which extended its influence and power by means of this very persecution far abroad on the earth." ⁷

"We cannot help observing how frequently strong expressions concerning his share in the injustice and cruelty now perpetrated are multiplied in the Scriptures. In Luke's narrative, in St. Paul's own speeches, and in his earlier and later epistles, the subject recurs again and again. He "made havoc of the Church," invading the sanctuaries of domestic life, "entering into every house;" (Acts 8:3: see 9:2) and those whom he thus tore from their homes he "committed to prison;" or, in his own words at a later period, when he had recognized as God's people those whom he now imagined to be His enemies, "thinking that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ... in Jerusalem ... he shut up many of the saints in prison. (Acts 26:9,10; cf. 22:3)

"And not only did men thus suffer at his hands, but women also, a fact three times repeated as a great aggravation of his cruelty (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4). These persecuted people were scourged "in many synagogues." (Acts 26:10) Nor was Stephen

⁶ Clarke, Adam, *Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament*

⁷ Barnes, A., *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*

the only one who suffered death, as we may infer from the apostle's own confession.⁸

And what was worse than scourging or than death itself, he used every effort to make them blaspheme that holy name whereby they were called. His fame as an inquisitor was notorious far and wide. Even at Damascus, Ananias had heard (Acts 9:13) "how much evil he had done to Christ's saints at Jerusalem." He was known there (Acts 9:21) as "he that destroyed them which called on this Name in Jerusalem." It was not without reason that in the deep repentance of his later years, he remembered how he had "persecuted the Church of God and wasted it," (Gal. 1:13; cf Phil. 3:6) how he had been a "blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious," (1 Tim. 1:13), and that he felt he was "not meet to be called an Apostle," because he "had persecuted the Church of God."^{9 10}

Acts 8:4

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

Christians were scattered throughout the region as a result of the persecution that was taking place. Some had to seek employment elsewhere, others feared for their lives and moved to less hostile communities. Wherever they went, they witnessed for Christ, they "evangelized."

These people were not "ordained" to preach; they were common folks who communicated to their fellow-men in conversation and, probably in the synagogues, where everyone had the right to speak. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

The means which was devised by Satan for destroying the church became the instrument of its diffusion and establishment.

⁸ "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women (Acts 22:4), and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them (Acts 26:10)."

⁹ 1 Cor. 15:9. It should be observed that in all these passages from the Epistles the same word for "persecution" is used.

¹⁰ Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*

Preaching the word

euaggel izwmenoi ton logon "to carry the good news of the word." See Acts 11:19. This is not the usual word for preach.

Acts 8:5

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Philip went down

The distance from Jerusalem to Sebaste (the capital city of Samaria) is 35 miles. Jerusalem is 2740 feet above sea level; Sebaste is at about 1450 MSL, or 1290 feet lower in elevation.

Note the distinction between the evangelizing which all the scattered believers did (verse 4), and the formal preaching carried on by Philip. The word "preached" here is from **keirussw** which means "to herald or proclaim."

The following list shows the other places in this chapter where the word "preach" is used, and it gives the Greek from which the word is translated.

8:4, **euaggel izw**

8:5, **khruussw**

8:12, **euaggel izw** (Philip)

8:35, **euaggel izw**

8:40, **euaggel izw**

cf. 8:25, **diamarturew** "to testify; to declare solemnly," **lalew** "to speak; to talk," and **euaggel izw**.

The Jew looked upon the Samaritan as he looked upon the Gentile. His hostility to the Samaritan was probably the greater, in proportion as he was nearer. In conformity with the economy which was observed before the resurrection, Jesus Christ had said to His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5,6) Yet did the Savior give anticipative hints of His favor to Gentiles and Samaritans, in His mercy to the Syrophenician woman, and in His interview with the woman at the well of Sychar. And now the time was come for both the "middle walls of partition" to be destroyed. The dispersion brought Philip, a

companion of Stephen, the second of the seven, to a city of Samaria.¹¹ He came with the power of miracles and with the message of salvation. The Samaritans were convinced by what they saw, they listened to what he said, and there was great joy in that city.¹²

Acts 8:6

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

There were two things which fixed the attention of the people who listened to Philip, the things that he spoke and the miracles he performed. Philip did real miracles, he had the spiritual gift of miracles, which were undeniably different and better than the shallow magic of Simon the sorcerer.

They listened to Philip, took notice of the things he said, agreed with him, and took his message to heart. A large part of the population in the city were led to Christ by Philip's ministry.

Acts 8:7

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

This verse explains that demons, who possessed many of the people in the city, came out of those people. This is not a reference to some type of disease from which people were healed, but it was the actual freeing of people from possession by fallen angels. Physical healing is mentioned separately in this verse, indicating two different problems being solved.

When a person accepts Christ as Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, come into that person's life as an indwelling presence. When the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, no demon can occupy the same person. The believer's body is

¹¹ Acts 8:5. This was probably the ancient capital, at that time called *Sebaste*. The city of Sychar (John 4:5) had also received a Greek name. It was then *Neapolis*, and is still Nablus.

¹² Conybeare and Howson

the sacred dwelling of the Church Age, which makes it impossible for demon possession to occur in a Christian. (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20)

palsied = **paraluw** "to be paralyzed or palsied."

Acts 8:8

And there was great joy in that city.

joy - **kara** "joy"

Persecution in the Early Church

from *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, by Conybeare and Howson.

The death of St. Stephen is a bright passage in the earliest history of the church. Where in the annals of the world can we find so perfect an image of a pure and blessed saint as that which is drawn in the concluding verses of the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles? And the brightness which invests the scene of the martyr's last moments is the more impressive from its contrast with all that has preceded it since the crucifixion of Christ. The first apostle who died was a traitor. The first disciples of the Christian apostles whose deaths are recorded were liars and hypocrites. The kingdom of the Son of Man was founded in darkness and gloom. But a heavenly light reappeared with the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The revelation of such a character at the moment of death was the strongest of all evidences, and the highest of all encouragements. Nothing could more confidently assert the divine power of the new religion; nothing could prophesy more surely the certainty of its final victory.

To us who have the experience of many centuries of Christian history, and who can look back through a long series of martyrdoms to this which was the beginning and example of the rest, these thoughts are easy and obvious; but to the friends and associates of the murdered saint, such feelings of cheerful and confident assurance were perhaps more difficult. Though Christ was indeed risen from the dead, His disciples could hardly yet be able to realize the full triumph of the Cross over death. Even many years afterwards Paul the Apostle wrote to the Thessalonians concerning those who had "fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13) more peaceably

than Stephen, that they ought not to sorrow for them as those without hope; and now, at the very beginning of the Gospel, the grief of the Christians must have been great indeed, when the corpse of their champion and their brother lay at the feet of Saul the murderer. Yet, amidst the consternation of some and the fury of others, friends of the martyr were found,¹³ who gave him all the melancholy honors of a Jewish funeral, and carefully buried him, as Joseph buried his father, “with great and sore lamentation.” (Gen. 1:10)

After the death and burial of Stephen the persecution still raged in Jerusalem. That temporary protection which had been extended to the rising sect by such men as Gamaliel was now at an end. Pharisees and Sadducees, priests and people, alike indulged the most violent and ungovernable fury. It does not seem that any check was laid upon them by the Roman authorities. Either the procurator was absent from the city or he was unwilling to connive at what seemed to him an ordinary religious quarrel.

The eminent and active agent in this persecution was Saul. There are strong grounds for believing that if he was not a member of the Sanhedrin at the time of St. Stephen’s death, he was elected into that powerful senate soon after, possibly as a reward for the zeal he had shown against the heretic. He himself says that in Jerusalem he not only exercised the power of imprisonment by commission from the High Priests, but also, when the Christians were put to death, gave his vote against them.¹⁴ From this expression it is natural

¹³ Acts 8:2. Probably they were Hellenistic Jews impressed in favor of Christianity. It seems hardly likely that they were avowed Christians. There is nothing in the expression itself to determine the point.

¹⁴ The word “voice” in the AV should be read “vote.” Acts 26:10. If this inference is well founded, and if the qualification for a member of the Sanhedrin mentioned in the last chapter was a necessary qualification, Saul must have been a married man and the father of a family. If so it is probably that his wife and children did not long survive; for otherwise, some notice of them would have occurred in the subsequent narrative, or some allusion to them in the Epistles. And we know that if ever he had a wife she was not living when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7). It was customary among the Jews to marry at an early age. Baron Bunsen has expressed his belief in the tradition that St. Paul was a widower.

to infer that he was a member of that supreme court of judicature.

However this might be, his zeal in conducting the persecution was unbounded. We cannot help observing how frequently strong expressions concerning his share in the injustice and cruelty now perpetrated are multiplied in the Scriptures. In St. Luke’s narrative, in St. Paul’s own speeches, in his earlier and later epistles, the subject recurs again and again. He “made havoc of the Church,” invading the sanctuaries of domestic life, “entering into every house;” (Acts 8:3; see 9:2) and those whom he thus tore from their homes he “committed to prison;” or, in his own words at a later period, when he had recognized as God’s people those whom he now imagined to be His enemies, “thinking that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . in Jerusalem . . . he shut up many of the saints in prison. (Acts 26:9,10; cf. 22:3)

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¹⁵ “I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women (Acts 22:4), and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them (Acts 26:10).”

¹⁶ Acts 26:11. It is not said that he succeeded in causing any to blaspheme. It may be necessary to explain to some readers that the Greek imperfect merely denotes that the attempt was made; so in Gal. 1:23, alluded to at the end of this chapter.

been a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious,” (1 Tim. 1:13), and that he felt he was “not meet to be called an Apostle,” because he “had persecuted the Church of God.”¹⁷

From such cruelty, and such efforts to make them deny that Name which they honored about all names, the disciples naturally fled. In consequence of “the persecution against the Church at Jerusalem, they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” The Apostles only remained (Acts 8:1). But this dispersion led to great results. The moment of lower depression was the very time of the church’s first missionary triumph. “They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21) First the Samaritans and then the Gentiles received that Gospel which the Jews attempted to destroy. Thus did the providence of God begin to accomplish, by unconscious instruments, the prophecy and command which had been given, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Preaching

DEFINITION AND ETYMOLOGY

The word “preach” is found in many places in the New Testament (KJV); however, it has been translated from several different Greek words. For example, in 1 Cor. 1:17, the phrase “preach the Gospel” comes from εὐαγγελίζω (**euangelidzo**); while in 1:18 we see the phrase “the preaching of the cross”, which is ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ. You can see that the translators took some liberties with their use of the word “preach”.

The Greek verb κηρυσσω (**keiruso**) was commonly used in ancient times to refer to public proclamation or public teaching, and there are many NT verses where it is found. A complete listing can be found in a Greek concordance.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 15:9. It should be observed that in all these passages from the Epistles the same word for “persecution” is used.

The noun κηρυξ (**keirux**) refers to the “proclaimer; publisher; messenger” who is making the proclamation. Thus,

1 Tim. 2:7, “Whereunto I (Paul) am ordained a preacher (**keirux**), and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” (Likewise in 2 Tim. 1:11)

In 2 Pet. 2:5, Abraham is called a “preacher (**keirux**) of righteousness”.

The word **keirux** was used in several ways in ancient times. The **keirux** was a “publisher”, or “herald”, in the sense that he would broadcast important news to townspeople. The person making official proclamations or announcements to the public was called **keirux**, a sort of town crier.

A man assigned to carry messages between enemies on a battlefield was also called **keirux**.

The message of the **keirux** is the κηρυγμα (**keirugma**). The **keirugma** is what was given to the **keirux** to proclaim. The originator of the message may have been a battlefield officer or a public official.

In the Bible, the **keirux** is the preacher, the **keirugma** is his message, and keiruso is the act of preaching.

The English word “preaching” would be correct if it were used in its primary etymological sense of “proclaiming before the public”, the meaning which is derived from the Latin, *praedicere*. However, the modern use of “delivering a moral discourse or religious message of any kind and in any manner” does not give the meaning of **keirugma**. There is no finger-pointing or arm waving in **keirugma**.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES USING KEIRUGMA

In Matt. 12:41 and Luke 11:32, Jonah's message to the Ninevites is called keirugma. Jonah's job was to proclaim God's message of salvation in the Assyrian capital.

1 Cor. 1:17-22, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel (**euangelidzw**): not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

For the preaching (**logos**) of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

[Note: to "stop the mouths" of those who are opposed (Titus 1:9-11), the Lord employs preachers to bring an unusual message.]

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness (**morias**) of preaching (**keirugma**) to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach (**keiruso**) Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

1 Cor. 2:1-10

Titus 1:3

PRINCIPLES OF KEIRUGMA

1. The emphasis of **keirugma** is on the message. Someone in authority, who has something to communicate, gives the message to a messenger, the **keirux**, preacher, who passes the information on to someone else, usually in a public setting. It is expected that there will be attentive hearers who will be receptive to the message and who expect to derive some benefit from the message.
2. The messenger does not proclaim his own viewpoint, his own political opinions, his own grievances. The message is another person's communication. The public proclamation is not the platform for him to expound his own theories, to support his side in a debate, talk about his own projects, or get things off his chest. The **keirux** does not call the people

together for an important proclamation, then, instead, lecture them on some private matter not associated with the real message.

3. The Bible teacher gets his **keirugma** from God Himself, as revealed in the Word of God. Correct preaching is done by making the message clear to the people who are listening to the proclamation. Public teaching protects the privacy of the believer. Confining himself to the message, the preacher does not unduly influence the listeners with personality dynamics or bullying techniques. The listener can accept or reject the message in private.

Suffering

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an outline study to give you a start in thinking about the subject of suffering and to provide a catalogue to the many scripture passages relating to suffering. You would think that such a subject would be dreadful to study, but in the wonderful plan of God, the worst things are always the best things. As you read this article, look up the Bible passages that are indicated and ask the Lord to give you insight into His viewpoint on the issues raised.

We don't have to look far to see that there is a lot of suffering going on in the world. The media provide us with endless information on the plight of unfortunate people all over the world. We are certainly aware that in America most people don't suffer as do people in third world countries.

But we are also aware that we are members of the human race, and that some disaster, small or great, can come at any time without warning, something that makes us one of the statistics. Auto accident, cancer, tornado, volcano, falling airplanes...in fact we can suffer a lot just worrying about all the things that could happen to us. The Fickle Finger of Fate can zero in at any time with some kind of prime suffering - loss of job, loss of money, house burns down, etc.

THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE SUFFERS

It is a startling fact that part of God's plan for every human being includes a certain amount of suffering. All people suffer: rich or poor, smart or

dumb, American or African, Christian or non-Christian. Suffering of some kind is part of God's Plan of Grace, if you can imagine that.

Suffering can be defined as the removal or reduction (some curtailment or loss) of one or more of the things that make up the good things of life as we know it, things we call details of life. Details of life are any of dozens of features that make up a person's life, things related to his personal life, family life, social life, or community and national life. Things like loved ones, friends, money, cars, health, marriage, sex, job, house, possessions, social life, etc., are all details of life; and when you lose one of these things that you enjoy, the result is suffering.

We identify two types of happiness in life. The first type is human happiness which is happiness derived from any of the details of life. The other type is divine happiness which is the inner joy produced as part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the advancing believer in the Christian Way of Life.

Human happiness is temporary and *dependent*. It lasts only as long as the thing that provides the happiness. It depends on a detail of life to sustain it.

God's happiness is *independent* of anything in this world; it is possible, the Bible says, "to be content in whatsoever state I am", that is, to have a deep inner happiness and contentment that does not depend on other people, material possessions, or circumstances.

One way of describing suffering is to say that suffering comes from the removal of the human happiness. You can see, then, that if a person possesses God's joy (+H), the loss of human happiness is much more tolerable.

Suffering occurs by several means in human life, both for Christians and unbelievers, including the following:

- Suffering by loss of health - physical pain, illness, accident, loss of function, etc.
- Suffering by privation - the lack of something necessary such as food, shelter, clothing, transportation.

- Suffering from the weather - freezing weather or hot, storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, as well as earthquakes, volcanoes.
- Suffering from mental anguish - worry, sorrow, anguish, fears, phobias, bitterness, jealousy, not the least of which is "suffering by anticipation".
- Suffering from justice, the long arm of the law, deserved or undeserved.
- Suffering caused by other people. As long as there are two people in the same location...well, you know what I mean.

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS?

Many of our cares come from somebody's trampling on our rights, or what we think of as our rights. Don't you feel that you have a right to

Privacy
Possessions
Courteous treatment
Dignity
Consideration
Equal treatment
A fair share
Equal opportunity
etc, etc?

But where does it say that I have any rights at all? Do I have the right to be an American, to be in a good family, to be educated, to have enough food every day, to have a house, to be married to a fine person, to have good children, to have enough money?

It is clear from the Scriptures that we really have no rights whatsoever. The Lord has placed us in an environment with a certain supply of the gifts of His grace, and we didn't earn any of them. Everything we have, and everything we are able to obtain, comes as a result of the Grace of God; we have deserved nothing!

One of the most useful practices in the Christian way of life is to "cast all care" on God, as He invites us to do. You can think of this as the act of turning all your rights over to God, which amounts to a practical reliance on God for total provision,

including giving to us those rights which He sees fit.

We suffer needlessly because we demand our rights. We have no rights. We have only our just deserts, "the wages of sin is death", which, by the grace of God, have been taken care of by the work of Christ. We are aware that one of the best things we can teach children is to be thankful for what they have, and to stop fretting about what they don't have. Children complain about things not being fair or not being divided equally, but when these traits show up in adults, it is a sign that more growth in grace is needed.

PHIL. 2:1-8

COL. 3:12-17

These passages indicate that the more relaxed a person is with regard to the details of life, the less he will experience the ill effects of some types of suffering. Often the amount of suffering can be limited through having a relaxed mental attitude toward a person or situation. Even severe privation or emotional trauma caused by the sin or hatred of another person can be reduced remarkably by the use of principles of Faith Rest, forgiveness, by relying on the Father for all provision, by allowing God to protect your reputation, etc.

GENERAL SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

An individual will have his allotted portion of suffering as a member of the human race as described above. Many people have no concept of "all things working together for good." Their main goal in life is to reduce his own suffering to a minimum, even if it means making other people suffer to do it.

God intends, as part of His Plan, for suffering to awaken a person to the reality of the existence of God, to motivate positive volition at the point of God consciousness. Whatever the immediate cause of his suffering, the ultimate reason is that of directing his attention to the person of Jesus Christ. Suffering has a tendency to slow people down, to reduce their arrogance, to reduce their self-righteousness, their self-satisfaction, their self-reliance.

Think about it -- where would you be today if everything had always been rosy, and you were unfailingly prosperous in all areas of life? Would you be going to church, taking in the Word, trying to figure out God's answers to life's dilemmas?

What about people who are suffering great deprivation because of locale (Bangladesh or the Sahel), or because of war, or because of cruel ideologies? Are these things part of the grace of God? An important fact is that God knows the spiritual needs of every person in the world, and He knows every person's mental makeup. Only He can decide what combination of blessing and suffering is the best recipe for encouraging a person to become a Christian. He does not force man's volition; but He will allow circumstances to develop around a person which will direct his attention toward Himself.

WHY BELIEVERS SUFFER

Christians suffer for many reasons, sometimes through no fault of their own. A Christian will experience a normal amount of suffering as part of human existence. But if a believer stays in fellowship with God and grows in Christ consistently, this type of suffering can be a great blessing and an opportunity to witness to other believers and to the unsaved.

SUFFERING THAT THE CHRISTIAN CAN AVOID

To the backslidden Christian who is out of fellowship and already quite miserable, however, suffering never brings blessing, and everything he touches turns to misery. Even the details of life don't make him happy; and he wastes his years in empty living.

ECCL. 2:1-12

A lot of a Christian's suffering can be avoided, however, and God has provided many remedies for reducing the distress a person causes himself.

You can avoid suffering caused by divine discipline.

Heb. 12:1-15

Psalm 38

Chastisement is avoided by staying in fellowship, confessing sin, forsaking sin, laying aside every weight...that is, choosing to obey God.

You can avoid suffering from failure to isolate sin, resulting in "chain sinning". An example is the failure to forgive an offense. This leads to mental attitude sins such as anger, bitterness, desire for revenge, judging. These, in turn, lead to sins of the tongue, maligning, gossip, false accusations. The offended party suffers worse than the original offender. But the whole chain can be broken by forgiving the other party and confessing the sins in the chain.

You can avoid suffering due to a guilt reaction to sin; the maintaining of a guilt complex. Remember that Christ died for all our sins; He bore the guilt for us. (1 Pet. 3:18; 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). One may have confessed sin biblically and be in fellowship and still labor under a heavy load of guilt. But this is unbelief. A guilt complex itself is sinful, because one says by this that the Lord has not forgiven. But, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgression from us."

You can avoid suffering which comes from maintaining a lifestyle like the unsaved. This is a life of callousness in the soul, emptiness, blindness, as shown in Eph. 4:17-32. The cure - Bible teaching every day while maintaining fellowship with God.

You can avoid suffering due to the rejection of authority, such as parental authority, school authority, civil authority, military authority, etc. READ Judges 19 and 10, Matt. 7:29 to 8:13, Jer. 7, and Prov. 30

You can avoid suffering caused by making decisions outside of the plan of God.

- Don't follow a career that takes you away from the Word.
- Don't reject divine principles of marriage (marrying an unbeliever, getting a divorce, etc.)
- Don't follow any "greener pastures" leading or make changes in your circumstances because you think you will be happier in the new situation.

- Don't raise children by human viewpoint instead of doing it God's way.
- In general, don't reject the Word of God, either through neglect or willful disobedience.

You can avoid suffering from failure to have your armor on.

EPH. 6.

THE BELIEVER'S UNDESERVED SUFFERING IS INTENDED FOR BLESSING

The following is a list of reasons why believers in fellowship suffer undeservedly in order to bring blessing to themselves or others.

1. Suffering for the glory of God: Book of Job; Isa. 48:9-11
2. Suffering to comfort others: 2 Cor. 1:3-6
3. Suffering to demonstrate the power of God, the provisions of grace: 2 Cor. 12:8-10
4. Suffering from spiritual growing pains; the testing that strengthens faith: Deut. 8:1-10; James 1:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:7,8; Rom. 5:3
Faster growth means more frequent testing; there is a refining process: Job. 23:10; Isa. 1:18-27; 1 Pet. 1:7
5. Suffering to keep down pride: 2 Cor. 12:6,7; Matt. 26:31-75 (the scattering of the disciples)
6. Suffering to illustrate doctrine (for advanced believers: Book of Hosea)
7. Suffering by association occurs when we have some relationship with someone who is suffering: Rom. 14:7; 1 Cor. 12:26; 1 Chron. 21
8. Suffering to show the fruit of the Spirit and the results of edification: 2 Cor. 4:6-11
9. Suffering to learn the value of doctrine: Psalm 119:65-72
10. Suffering as a witness to Christ: 2 Tim. 2:8-12; John 15:18-21; Acts 5:40-42; 1 Cor. 4:9-16
11. Suffering as a result of exercising a spiritual gift; illustrated by the life of the Apostle Paul
12. Suffering from involvement in spiritual battles, the angelic conflict: Eph. 3:8-13

PROMISES TO BELIEVERS WHO SUFFER

Psalm 34:19,20; Isa. 43:2; 2 Cor. 4:17 and 12:9;
1 Peter 5:10

Philip the Evangelist

In the sixth chapter of Acts, we read that the Apostles commissioned seven men in the congregation at Jerusalem to supervise the church's ministry to the needs of its widows and other poor. (This is generally considered to be the beginning of the office of Deacon in the Church, although the Scriptures do not use this term in referring to the original seven men.) Two of these have gained lasting fame. One was Stephen, who became the Church's first martyr. The other was Philip, whose story we find in Acts 8:5-40; 21:8-9.

After the death of Stephen, there was a general persecution of the Church at Jerusalem, and many Christians fled to escape it. Philip fled to Samaria, where he preached the Gospel to the Samaritans, a group who had split off from the Jewish people about six centuries earlier, had intermarried with other peoples, and were considered outsiders by most Jews. They received the message with eagerness, and soon Peter and John came to Samaria to bless the new converts.

After this, Philip was sent by God to walk along the road from Jerusalem southwest to Gaza, where he met a eunuch (a term meaning literally a castrated man, but also used to mean simply an official of a royal court) of the Queen of Ethiopia, returning home after worshipping in Jerusalem. The man was reading from Isaiah 53 ("He was wounded for our transgressions"), and Philip told him about Jesus, and persuaded him that the words were a prophecy of the saving work of Jesus. The man was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing, while Philip went north to Caesarea, the major seaport of Israel, and its secular capital.

When Paul (accompanied by Luke) was going up to Jerusalem for the last time, he paused at Caesarea and spent several days with Philip. (This may be the source of some of the information Luke used in writing the early chapters of Acts.) We are told that Philip had four daughters who prophesied.

Was Philip the Deacon the same person as Philip the Apostle?

No, they were different. There were Twelve Apostles, and they said, "Our work is to preach the Gospel, not to administer the budget. Choose seven men to administer the budget." Obviously they meant seven men other than themselves.

Moreover, when Philip went to Samaria, and preached and made converts, he baptized them, but none of them received the Holy Spirit. It was not until Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them that they received the Spirit.

Philip's Evangelism

The Jew looked upon the Samaritan as he looked upon the Gentile. His hostility to the Samaritan was probably the greater, in proportion as he was nearer. In conformity with the economy which was observed before the resurrection, Jesus Christ had said to His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5,6) Yet did the Savior give anticipative hints of His favor to Gentiles and Samaritans, in His mercy to the Syrophenician woman, and in His interview with the woman at the well of Sychar. And now the time was come for both the "middle walls of partition" to be destroyed. The dispersion brought Philip, a companion of Stephen, the second of the seven, to a city of Samaria.¹⁸ He came with the power of miracles and with the message of salvation. The Samaritans were convinced by what they saw, they listened to what he said, and there was great joy in that city.

When the news came to Jerusalem, Peter and John were sent by the Apostles, and the same miraculous testimony attended their presence which had been given on the day of Pentecost. The Divine Power in Peter rebuked the power of evil which were working among the Samaritans in the Person of Simon Magus, as Paul afterwards, on his first preaching to the Gentiles, rebuked in Cyprus

¹⁸ Acts 8:5. This was probably the ancient capital, at that time called *Sebaste*. The city of Sychar (John 4:5) had also received a Greek name. It was then *Neapolis*, and is still Nablus.

Elymas the Sorcerer. The two apostles returned to Jerusalem, preaching as they went in many villages of the Samaritans the Gospel which had been welcomed in the city.

Once more we are permitted to see Philip on his labor of love. We obtain a glimpse of him on the road which leads down by Gaza to Egypt. The chamberlain of Queen Candace is passing southwards on his return from Jerusalem, and reading in his chariot the prophecies of Isaiah.¹⁹ Ethiopia is "stretching out her hands to God" (Psalm 68:31), and the suppliant is not unheard. A teacher is provided at the moment of anxious inquiry. The stranger goes on his way rejoicing, a proselyte who had found the Messiah, a Christian baptized with water and the Holy Spirit. The Evangelist, having finished the work for which he had been sent, is called elsewhere by the Spirit of God. He proceeds to Caesarea and we hear of him no more, until, after the lapse of twenty years, he received under his roof in that city one who, like himself, had traveled in obedience to the Divine command "preaching in all the cities."²⁰

If eleven of the Twelve Apostles refused the work of administering the church's welfare program, but one, for special reasons, accepted it, it is not clear that Luke would have felt bound to point this out. The Jerusalem community may have thought it desirable to have one man serve both as one of the Twelve and one of the Seven, so as to provide a link, a liaison, between the two groups. Philip, who specifically named in John's account of the feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6:5), is likely to have had special abilities in organizing the feeding of the hungry, and related matters. Moreover, the Seven were originally appointed because the Greek-speaking Jews complained that their widows were being neglected. Philip had a Greek name ("lover of horses"), which at least suggests

¹⁹ Candace is the name, not of an individual, but of a dynasty, like Aretas in Arabia, or like Pharaoh and Ptolemy.

²⁰ "But Philip was found at Azotus; and, passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea." (Acts 8:40) "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him." (Acts 21:8)

some kind of Hellenistic element in his background. Even more to the point, we note that earlier, when a group of Greek-speaking Jews wanted a chance to speak with Jesus, they went first to Philip (Jn 12:20f). Clearly Philip was a good choice for dealing with Hellenists.

As for the objection that Philip's Samaritan converts receive the laying on of hands, not from Philip, but from Peter and John, it must be noted that Peter and John were there specifically as representatives of the Apostles gathered at Jerusalem. It may very well be that Philip wanted to make sure that the receiving of a group of Samaritans into the Church, a gesture certain to stir up violent emotions in some Christians, had the official support of the College of Apostles.

Negative Volition

The Apostle Paul issued a stern warning to mature Christian believers living at Ephesus when he told them to beware of falling into a state of indifference to, or antagonism to, the Word of God. He stated that if they were to become to become negative to the Lord's teachings, their lives would very quickly become indistinguishable from those of unbelievers in terms of fruitfulness and Christian character.

Ephesians 4:17-19, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity (emptiness) of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

The "darkness" referred to in these verses begins with a negative disposition toward the Word of God. This volitional decision not to follow the Scriptures leads immediately to a breakdown in the faith system of understanding divine viewpoint. There is a cessation in the spiritual growth process; and there is actually a total reversal in progress in the Christian life (backsliding, or reversion).

As a result of the lack of divine viewpoint in the soul, the negative person begins to entertain human standards, human criteria, human doctrine, human programs -- these things, plus the full gamut of Satanic doctrine, are substituted for the plan of God. The further result is subjectivity, unhappiness, and deep frustration in trying to live by techniques which do not work.

These conditions lead to a frantic search for happiness through details of life such as riches, friendships, possessions, human approbation, personal influence and power, and so forth. The believer on this treadmill is a slave to these details of life rather than being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. While the believer thus engaged is still "in Christ" positionally, he is actually no better off than an unbeliever as far as this life is concerned. In fact, he is destined to be far unhappier than the unbeliever, as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

The time, energy, and emotional commitments to this person's search for happiness lead to further isolation from the teachings of the Word of God.

He is spending maximum effort trying to find happiness through other means. Thus, the very method for reversing the downward trend is ignored!

During this process, neuroses and psychoses are being developed, aggravated by the self-induced misery which accompanies chronic and unmitigated sins of the mind such as pride, jealousy, envy, vindictiveness, worry, fear, mental adultery, implacability, and the like, from which there is no relief outside of the plan of God.

Because of these sin patterns, divine discipline is compounded daily. This believer has a horrible life composed of (1) his own failures, (2) doubled and re-doubled chastisement, (3) his self-induced unhappiness, and (4) the fact that he has no defense against the attacks of Satan and his demons. His human "righteousness" (-r) has replaced the divine righteousness (+R) of God. But this whole miserable situation is avoidable, as you will see with further study.