

The Chosen People

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*There is comfort in
God's Waiting Room*



When Bad Things Happen to Good People. . . . This is the intriguing title of Rabbi Harold Kushner's best-selling book dealing with the problem of suffering. As a rabbi, he personally had to wrestle with this great problem. His son was a victim of a debilitating, ultimately terminal disease. He and his wife watched his son grow quickly to old age in a few short years. Sadly, Rabbi Kushner's solution to suffering was that God is not sovereign, that God is not in control of all the events that affect our lives.

Each of us has gone through periods of suffering. Sometimes it's sickness, or it may be an untimely death of a loved one or watching another family member or friend suffer. We are touched with their infirmity. We too ask the question, Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?

There are no easy answers to the problem of suffering. We must rest in the sufficiency of God's grace. His promises are real. It is in our weakness that His strength is found. We must trust Him, knowing that He in His sovereignty, in His grace, in His mercy, is perfecting His will and purpose in our lives.

These precious truths were made clear to Dr. Lehman Strauss and his beloved wife, Elsie. Dr. Strauss had been preaching and teaching God's Word for more than fifty years. He's an author, pastor, and Bible conference speaker. One day while he was speaking at a Bible conference, he received a telephone call telling him that Elsie, his wife, had just suffered a stroke.

Several years have now passed, and at one of our mission's Bible conferences on prophecy in Seattle, Washington, Dr. Strauss shared with me some of the many thoughts that ran through his mind as he caught the plane home on that April day.

Subsequently, he penned his experiences. In his book, *In God's Waiting Room*, he writes, "There I was, a lonely man sitting in a plane, yet surrounded by people. I did not know the seriousness of Elsie's illness. I only knew that she had had a stroke. I couldn't think of anything or anyone except Elsie. I felt bleak and desolate. Never had I known such loneliness. I breathed a weak prayer, 'Dear Lord, help me!' I wanted to say more, but I just couldn't articulate. I can't remember when I felt so drained, so utterly weak—too weak to pray.

"But God came to me in a most comforting and consoling way by calling to my mind one of His precious promises. I had memorized it as a young Christian. 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest' (Ex. 33:14)."

Dr. Lehman Strauss, *In God's Waiting Room*, p. 13.

He then went on to tell me the other Scriptures the Holy Spirit brought to his remembrance. He realized that he was not alone; that our Lord's presence is made more real in suffering.

In this issue of *The Chosen People*, you will read about Dr. Strauss's experience in coping with the problem of "when bad things happen to good people." You'll also read about some of the trials and burdens that our missionaries bear. They too have found that God gives that special extra measure of grace, so that His strength is indeed seen through our infirmities.

In Messiah,

HAROLD A. SEVENER

The Chosen People

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In God's Waiting Room

"The believer in Christ is expected to get to know God better as he walks the pilgrim pathway. But there are things that he can learn only through suffering. One of those things is that He is the God of all comfort."

With this introduction, Dr. Lehman Strauss begins his discussion of "The God of All Comfort." This essay describes one of the lessons God taught him when Elsie, his wife of fifty years, suffered a stroke.

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Dr. Strauss, well-known author and Bible teacher, has given us permission to excerpt and condense one portion of his book, *In God's Waiting Room*, published by the Radio Bible Class.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

Blessed be God, even the Father
Of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies
And the God of all comfort,
Who comforteth us in all our
tribulation,
That we may be able to comfort
them who are in trouble,
By the comfort with which we
ourselves
are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:3, 4

When Paul spoke of *the God of all comfort*, he was speaking of a knowledge of God that he himself had experienced. Undoubtedly he included himself in the plural word "us" in verse 4. I take this as his personal testimony that in all of his troubles and tribulations, he was comforted by God.

That comfort did not merely enable him to endure his trials but also to receive special blessings from them. Paul's knowledge of God as *the God of all comfort* is therefore not a mere intellectual and academic one; it is a blessed and rewarding experience. He knows what he is talking about. He suffered such severe tribulation in Asia that he even despaired of his life (1:8, 9). . . .

The word "comfort" comes from the Greek word *paraklesis*. It appears ten times in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, and is translated "comfort" six times and "consolation" four times. It combines the idea of solace with soothing.

Paraklesis is made up of *para* meaning "beside," and *kaleo* meaning "to call." The Christian who is suffer-

ing needs a special kind of comfort that only God can give. As our loving Comforter, He stands by our side to minister the soothing balm we need. . . .

God's comfort is unique. It is infinite, inexhaustible, immutable, and indestructible. Our afflictions are temporary and transient; God's comfort is "everlasting" (2 Thess. 2:16). It is available at all times.

No Christian is left to face sickness and sorrow alone. . . . Let us now take a look at some of the divinely

The Word of God is powerful. It is powerful enough to reach the innermost recesses of each of us, down deep where we really hurt. . . . We must receive the Word of God in faith.



provided means of comfort, ways by which God's comfort comes to us.

First, there is the comfort of the Savior. When our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He was the Comforter to His disciples. He was alongside to sustain them when they were drifting on the storm-tossed sea.

He was alongside to supply for them when there was a shortage of food. He was alongside to strengthen them when they suffered persecution at the hands of their enemies. He was alongside to solace them in their sorrows. He was the divine *paraclete*.

The Greek word *paraclete* is translated "advocate" in 1 John 2:1. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word "advocate" is the same Greek word translated "comforter."

You see, our Lord's death did not bring an end to His ministry of comfort for His own. He arose from death and the grave, and He ascended to heaven, where He is now at the Father's right hand on our behalf. He is there to represent us, even when we sin. . . .

By His death Christ removed the guilt and penalty of our sin; by His resurrection from death He gives eternal life to every person who trusts Him for salvation; in His ascension and exaltation to the Father He intercedes for us. He does now "appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24) where "He ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb. 7:25). He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15), not merely theoretically but practically. . . .

Our Great High Priest understands, and He ministers in our behalf right now. At this very moment He is praying for us. When we suffer, He understands. In our trials we

are blessed by the comfort of our Savior. . . .

Second, there is the comfort of the Spirit. Before our Lord died on the cross, He said to His disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you comfortless" (Jn. 14:16-18).

Here we have our Lord's promise that after His departure He would send the Holy Spirit to carry on the ministry of comfort.

It is recorded of the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria that they "were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

This is written testimony of the fulfillment of Christ's promise that another Comforter would come to minister to His church. Those suffering and persecuted Christians were strengthened by "the comfort of the Holy Spirit." . . .

I am not suggesting that the way is easy. In my best moments I am aware of dangerous and devilish intrusions into my mind. The Christian life is a conflict. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17).

If we give way to the sinful nature in us, we grieve the Holy Spirit and miss His comfort. But when we are controlled by Him, He is a strong Comforter in our infirmities and afflictions.

Third, there is the comfort of the Scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote, "For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). How much do we really know in our personal ex-



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perience about the comfort of the Scriptures? . . .

God's Word is continuously alive and active. The Bible is not a dead letter; it is not passive nor passé. It is continuously at work, producing and preserving spiritual life.

Then too, the Word of God is powerful. The Greek word translated "powerful" is *energes*, from which we get our English word "energy." It is powerful enough to reach the innermost recesses of each of us, down deep where we really hurt. . . .

One reason the Scriptures were written was to comfort God's children in times of sickness, suffering, and sorrow. The learning we glean from the Bible is for the everyday experiences of life, and comfort is one of the needs the Scriptures supply.

The very fact that Paul quoted from the Old Testament tells us that he depended upon the Scriptures for consolation and encouragement.

An important factor is that we must receive the Word of God in faith. . . . The mere reading of some portion of Scripture or listening to someone expound it is not sufficient in itself.

The Word must be applied. James said, "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas. 1:22). . . .

While Elsie was in the hospital, each morning I would thank Him for blessings and mercies, which I mentioned one by one. Then, after a request for guidance, I would go immediately to the Word.

After I read and meditated quietly, I selected a verse, typed it on a 3 x 5 card, and began my drive to the hospital. On the way down I memorized the verse. Throughout the day I read it to Elsie at intervals, and before leaving her at night we would recite it together. This became our daily practice, and it continues to be the main source of strength and comfort to us.

Here are a few of the verses God used to sustain and comfort us: Deuteronomy 33:27; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 23; Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 26:3; Romans 8:28-32; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; Ephesians 3:16; Philipians 4:4, 6, 7; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; 5:18; 1 Peter 5:7.

As I write these lines, it is almost two years since our trial began. The Word of God is our stronghold. God remains faithful, and His grace continues to be sufficient.

We are confident that He who began His good work in us will carry it on to completion, until our Lord Jesus Christ returns (Phil. 1:6). In that day "we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2). □

Editor's note: Lehman Strauss's book In God's Waiting Room is currently being printed by Moody Bible Institute. We expect to offer it in a forthcoming issue of The Chosen People.



*A debilitating, sometimes
frightening illness opened
a young missionary
couple's understanding to
God's truth.*



“Bad things don’t happen to good people...”

away from the eyes of a loving God.

By GARY DERECHINSKY
Missionary, Brookline, MA

We had been married just over a year when the doctor diagnosed Marilou as having multiple sclerosis. At the time we were both pretty naive about the disease. Looking back, I think we both felt that we could conquer it, work around it, perhaps even ignore it.

In the past ten years, however,

we’ve learned to recognize the reality of disease and suffering. There have been many things in those years that have helped (in some cases, forced) us to grow.

Like most people, we hesitate to pour out our struggles in a public forum, but perhaps by sharing what we have learned, others can learn not to fear the pain they undergo.

First of all, we’ve learned that pain and suffering do exist. Much of the

popular Christian thinking encourages us to believe that we will never have deep suffering and pain if we are in God's will.

We try to rush through grief and struggles, using faith words as band-aids on our hurts, but that isn't the way God made us. Pain is very real, not just for sinners, but for saints. Denying this will only hinder what God wants to teach us.

As a minister, I've seen that the people with whom I work sometimes have deep problems. Listening to them is much harder than trying to soothe them with a balm of kind words. I can't always give them explanations for what they are going through. In my own life, I've often found that looking for explanations is fruitless because the answers often lead us to more unanswerable questions.

Yet the willingness to recognize, if not understand, pain can open our understanding to God's truth. We have been forced to come to grips with the reality of the Fall. There is a reason why pain exists, and it has to do with the world in which we live: a flawed, sin-scarred world.

Bad things don't happen to good people away from the eyes of an ever-loving God, but instead, they happen in a world deranged by sin and yet still in the midst of a God who cares. When we can accept this, the reality and hope that eternity brings are much more vivid.

Pain also heightens our ability to see God's great power. Neither Marilou nor I have ever been able to praise God for her illness, but we have many, many times praised God for what we have seen Him do when things seemed most hopeless.

One of my times of deepest despair came about a year ago when Marilou

had a particularly bad attack. She was unable to walk, and I had to carry her downstairs, put her into the car, and then carry her into the hospital.

Though I had always considered myself strong and stalwart, I was suddenly flooded with doubts about my own ability to cope. Would I be able to care for her if she was totally disabled? What if I really couldn't do everything I thought I could? I had

The willingness to recognize, if not understand, pain can open our understanding to God's truth. There is a reason why pain exists, and it has to do with the world in which we live: a flawed, sin-scarred world.

never felt so weak and vulnerable and had never questioned so deeply my ability to go on.

I came home from the hospital and picked up my guitar. I found myself writing a song, trying to express to Marilou my love for her. As I listened to the words, I realized that God was speaking to me. His love for us is deeper than my love for Marilou could ever be. His presence more real. His ability never faltering. He would never abandon us.

Yes, we have watched Him become

mighty in our lives, and we have seen the truth of Romans 8:28, that in all things God works for our good. Even more, we have learned that with Paul we can say, "And we know," for indeed, we know these things rather than theorize about them.

I also reflect now on one of the greatest gifts God has given us, the gift of sensing and knowing the presence of God's people. As groups have prayed for us, we have had supernatural strengthenings and overwhelming love poured out. We see these as real as the love we have for each other.

Last, I have learned more about love than I ever knew was possible when I first met my bride-to-be as a youth in high school. I have learned that love means commitment, serving, and sometimes self-sacrifice.

There are times in my walk with God or in my ministry when I want to take the fastest, easiest way through. But love, whether for other people or for God, calls us to go beyond a minimal commitment. It calls for us to be willing to give whatever it takes whenever it is needed.

More than the love I've given is the love I've received, and this love has affected me, perhaps more than any other single aspect of my life.

We don't know why this has happened to us. We really don't know if we care to know. But above all things, we've learned that there is nothing to be feared if God is on our side. In Him, nothing befalls us that cannot be used as an opportunity to learn more about Him and to praise His Name. □

Pray for Marilou and Gary. Their testimony continues to the Jewish community of Brookline, Massachusetts, as ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries missionaries. Gary also fields biblically based questions in the "Question and Answers" column of The Chosen People.

Victor and Debora Sedaca founded and directed the ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries outreach in Buenos Aires. For fifteen years they labored faithfully, seeing many people come to faith in the Messiah. Though Victor went to be with the Lord in June of 1979 and Debora in February 1985, their outreach continues in a growing revival among Argentinian Jews that is now taking place.

The Sedacas' children, Alicia, David and Jorge (as well as countless spiritual children), are a living legacy to the faithfulness of this godly couple, serving the Lord in a variety of positions around the world.

Debora's final battle with cancer is briefly described here in her own words. It is our hope that others may gain strength from the optimism and persistence which the Lord so graciously gave to her.

—Editor

By DEBORA SEDACA

"Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him."

Genesis 32:1

Today, December 8, 1983, I am at the Evangelical Hospital. It was hard to enter the hospital this time because I was feeling better than I had for some time. I had resumed my activities in the Mission, my church, the Women's Committee of the Evangelical Hospital, the Women's Convention of Argentina (Baptist) and in my house answering letters and talking to my neighbors. I was not happy to go under drug treatment again because it affects my body and leaves me down for several days.

Today is a sunny summer day, and my friends from the hospital are downstairs waiting to go on the annual hospital picnic. I wait as the nurses start the chemotherapy treatment. Yesterday, talking to my daughter, I remembered that tomorrow, December 9, marks three years since the first surgery for two small tumors in the left side of my neck. I had gone to see the doctor, and he had sent me to see the surgeon, who said that surgery

was needed immediately. I had no problems during the surgery, but the results of the biopsy revealed lymphatic lymphocyte.

I already had my bus ticket to go on holiday when I went to the doctor for the results of the biopsy. "You can't go on holiday," he told me. "You have to go under treatment immediately." I immediately went to talk with my son, David. I started crying, "I can't go on holiday. . . ."

Then I explained what the doctor had said, and David encouraged me, saying, "You go under treatment, then go on holiday." So instead of leaving, I went to the hospital for chemotherapy. Since then, I have had three surgeries. The last and most serious was in April 1983 when the tumor that was in my parotid gland was removed.

The biopsies always had the same discouraging results. Yesterday I was telling my doctor that this was my twelfth time in the hospital in three years of treatment, with forty-eight

DEBORA SEDACA

1916—1984



chemotherapy treatments.

Once I moved my arm while the drug was passing in, and the needle came out of the vein. I suffered an inflammation, and even though the nurses acted quickly, the burning was terrible. I had great pain for a month. It was winter then, but I had to put ice on it just to calm the pain. During that time my mother-in-law passed away and I could hardly go to the funeral.

Besides chemotherapy, I've had three series of six BCG vaccines. After the most serious surgery, I had an Rx cobalt treatment. The effects of that treatment were terrible because my mouth and throat were so burnt that I could not eat anything solid. I could only have milk and other liquids through a straw. I lost fifteen kilos (thirty-three pounds) of weight in three months.

Why am I telling all this? It seems so negative. Four years ago my husband died and I had to undergo that discouraging experience too. Yet my pastor said, "Debora, you must write about everything that is happening to you."

"What for?" I thought. There are many people in the same situation.

But my pastor insisted that I had something to share. The Lord is supporting me in this long trial, giving me not only spiritual and personal strength, but helping me to continue with my activities, allowing me to encourage others in similar situations.

The Evangelical Hospital has become like my own house; I am constantly surrounded by my angels there. "He will send His angels near you so your feet will not stumble on a rock." The volunteer workers do everything

they can to take care of me and make me feel comfortable. The loving nurses and helpful maids, everyone is so worried about me. The pastor of my church and his wife, whom I consider my own children because I was friends with his parents at the Seminary, and the director of our Mission, who was both a friend and a disciple, always visit me, sharing experiences, reading Bible passages, and praying with me.

And what can I say of the wonderful family God has given me? My sons are really concerned, not only trying to make me feel comfortable and calm, but also encouraging me to follow the treatment when discouragement tries to make me give up. My youngest son once said to the doctor,

Deborah Sedaca's spiritual children are everywhere—from a young believer giving his testimony in a Buenos Aires street meeting to an Argentinian Jew finding the Lord. Surely she has left this world a godly legacy.

"We want to have our mother, even without hair."

Three times I have lost my hair completely. A bald head is a terrible experience for a woman. The first time it took me by surprise. I had questioned my doctor about the treatment, and she had answered, "You will lose hair." I thought it would be a minimal amount like in pregnancy. But within three days I had no hair. I started wearing wigs, turbans and handkerchiefs, which were fashionable but also very hot. Hair grows again, but during the months that it takes to grow you must be patient. After the last surgery, I suffered facial paralysis, causing the right side to be twisted and my eyelid to droop. But praise God, I am recovering from this too.

And what can I say of my doctor, the oncologist, who is treating me? Somebody (I say the Lord) contacted the directors of the hospital, and this doctor, who has studied for seven years at the famous hospital of Dr. Mathe in Paris, came to the hospital especially to treat me. Then many other patients came to see her, and now she is very well known at the Evangelical Hospital. She is very skilled and also very compassionate. Our relationship is more than that of a doctor and her patient; it is one of friendship and counselling. She is a sincere Catholic and we often share our beliefs.

All my family is completely devoted to church work and ministry. With all these rewards, what else can I ask God? One of my favorite hymns says, "I know I am happy with the life He gave me," and this is my experience during the time He will give me to live. To belong to Him brings so much richness.

Note: After having written this testimony, I had to take chemotherapy treatments twice during the first months of 1984. By the end of June my health became worse, and I had to enter the hospital. Several tests showed that the cancer was also in the abdominal area, and I had to undergo chemotherapy two more times. I have lost my hair a fourth time, and this time there is less possibility of recovering because the treatment was so severe. It has not been easy to accept this new situation, but as always the Lord has come to help me.

Only a few days ago I had as my daily devotional reading 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

May God allow all believers to know this truth while they live on earth. □

"The one who suffers alone suffers most"

—Jewish Proverb

In this issue of *The Chosen People*, we've shared several different aspects of suffering. Whether or not you have personally undergone such pain, we pray that as you read these articles, you will be comforted by the overwhelming trust the writers have expressed in our great God and Father.

But more than comfort, we hope you will gain a new vision for the hope God gives. A hope that serves as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Heb. 6:19).

Every day your ABMJ missionaries meet Jewish people who are without hope. Without the comfort of the Lord. Some of these people are suffering. Some of them are suffering alone. But there are none who cannot be lifted into the hands of an everlasting God, a Savior so caring that He died for their sins.

Come with us to take the words of everlasting life to those who are without His joy. Join us in telling them that Jesus will never abandon them, will never forsake them. Stand with us through your prayers and gifts as we take this great message to the Jewish people.

- I promise to pray for ABMJ missionaries and for the salvation of the Jewish people.
- I also enclose \$ _____ in support of ABMJ missionaries.

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STREET ADDRESS

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By JIM BATES
Missionary, Boca Raton, FL

"Glenn, we'd like to talk to you about Jesus." There aren't many conversations with strangers that I can begin this way, but the circumstances surrounding this meeting weren't ordinary.

It was in a local thrift store run by a Christian ministry that Esther Brown and I first met Glenn. As Esther was browsing through the store, I talked with one of the workers who told me that a man in their live-in program was Jewish and didn't know Jesus.

Both Esther and I were eager to meet him, and in a few minutes found ourselves facing a Jewish man in his early twenties.

When I told Glenn we'd like to talk to him about Jesus, he was quite open and agreeable.

As one of the workers went to get a Bible, Esther told Glenn how she had come to faith. Esther is a senior citizen, a Jewish believer who had been baptized by Joseph Hoffman Cohn many years ago in New York.

Then I told Glenn how I, a Gentile, had come to faith, explaining that no one is born a Christian. "Being a Christian means I have a personal relationship with God," I said. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He nodded. It was obvious he had heard the Gospel before, yet he couldn't understand how a person who was Jewish could believe in Jesus. Esther and I continued.

Soon we were discussing Scripture, showing him what the Bible says about man's sinfulness. When I opened Isaiah 53 and showed it to Glenn, it was as if a light went on in his head. "This is Jesus!" he exclaimed.

I turned to John 3 and read to him about another Jewish man who had come to Jesus. This man, Nicodemus, learned that one must be born again. I began to tell Glenn what that meant.

Finally I explained to him that Jesus was the Messiah, sent by God to atone for our sins, to die for us, to give us eternal life.

"I want this," Glenn said. "What do I have to do?"

Sitting there in the thrift store, on old furniture probably donated by a loving friend to further God's work, Esther and I prayed. Glenn followed in his own words, asking the Savior into his heart. That same week Glenn began attending our Bible study.

Though Glenn has now moved to another city, he continues on strong and growing in the Lord. How I rejoice and thank God each time I remember the day we went bargain hunting and found a heart of gold. □

I was only Bargain hunting. *But I found a heart of gold.*

Jim has worked as an ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries missionary in New York, Massachusetts, and recently Florida. Keep him in your prayers for the recent home-going of his wife, Lib.





“I Hate God!”

*Ira's father was dead. Now
he hated the only One who
could comfort him*

By SAM NADLER
Missionary, New York, NY

This is the story of Ira. “I hate God” was the way he began his discussion with me. His hatred showed itself not only in his words but in his slit eyes and clenched fists.

He growled about the pain and anguish that he felt God had put him through. Then he spit out a list of his resentments over the life he must now live because God had taken his father “before his time.” He could not accept that God had a plan, for how could any plan of a supposedly loving God ruin the lives of so many of his “chosen people”?

As I sat there listening to his words and feeling his pain, I prayed, “Lord, how can I comfort this man? He’s only twenty-five, but he has the accumulated bitterness of many generations.”

“But God loved your father,” I explained. Ira just listened as I read from Isaiah 57:1, 2: “The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly

enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.”

I explained that many times God removes us before an even worse evil happens. Perhaps it was in God’s compassion that his father died even though he was only fifty-eight years old. I tried to explain that it is always the right time because it is God’s time.

“But so many wicked get so much more out of life,” Ira argued. “My father spent his whole life trying to raise a good Jewish family, and there are so many Mafioso chiefs who live longer and better. How can it be?”

“Can I share one of my favorite psalms with you, Ira?” I asked. “It is Psalm 73.” As I started to read to him, he began to calm down, to listen, and to think. When I got to verses 21 and 22—“When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you”—he stopped me.

“Well, you can put my name in there,” he said. “That’s talking about me.”

By the end of the psalm his eyes were moist, his face had softened, and his voice had grown quiet. I took his hand and said, “Even though I am

*Responsible for overseeing
ABM/Chosen People
Ministries' outreach in the
northeastern USA and
eastern Canada, Sam is
also pastor of the Light of
Israel, a Jewish Christian
congregation in White
Plains, NY.*



a believer in Messiah Jesus, when my daddy died, I was also angry with God because I loved my father. I can share your pain, but I can’t take it away. All I can tell you, Ira, is that the Lord can comfort you and help you to trust Him.”

Before Ira left that evening, he said he would like to keep in touch with me. Not long after this, he attended one of our services and listened to a message on the humble King from Zechariah 9:9. He was not ready to give his life to Jesus, but he is quieter now and is thinking. Ira, a man who once hated God, is now being drawn close to Him by bonds of love he does not understand.

Would you pray for Ira as we continue to minister to him and to many other Jewish people like him who have nothing but the bitterness of life and a fractured mirror with which to reflect upon God? □

From the Exile To the Christ:

The Exile

By DR. DANIEL FUCHS

In the year 586 B.C., it seemed that Jewish history had ended. Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It was the custom for victorious ancient nations to systematically scatter the people of the countries they conquered by enforced emigration.

This ruse kept the people from uniting in a common rebellion. In this way, 136 years before, the Assyrian kings had taken the ten tribes far to the north and northeast. To most historians, they are the "lost tribes." However, "lost" as they were, both physically and spiritually, the Bible clearly teaches, both in the Old and New Testaments, that they are not lost to God's plans and purposes.

Assyria, which conquered the ten tribes of Israel, was in turn conquered by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, who adopted the same tactics. In three separate movements from 605 B.C. to 586 B.C., he systematically destroyed the cities of Judah, deported most of the Jewish people, and scattered them in colonies along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Babylon.

It was a sad day for the Jews. To many, it seemed as if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were impotent against the gods of Assyria and Babylon. Their mental and spiritual states were deplorable. That the Temple had been destroyed and that they had been deported seemed to them clear proof that Jehovah was but one of many gods worshipped in Babylon.

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Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the cities of Judah, deported most of the Jewish people, and scattered them in colonies along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Babylon. It was a sad day for the Jews. To many, it seemed as if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were impotent against the gods of Assyria and Babylon.

Jewish people until we visualize the depravity of the Babylonian system. Will Durant, in his monumental work *The Story of Civilization*, describes one aspect of the Babylonian society.

"Ishtar (Astarte to the Greeks, Ashtoreth to the Jews) interests us not only as an analogue of the Egyptian Isis and prototype of the Grecian Aphrodite and the Roman Venus, but as the formal beneficiary of one of the strangest of Babylonian customs.

"She was Demeter as well as Aphrodite—no mere goddess of physical beauty and love, but the gracious divinity of bounteous motherhood, the secret inspira-

tion of the growing soil, and the creative principle everywhere.

"It is impossible to find much harmony, from a modern point of view, in the attributes and functions of Ishtar: she was the goddess of war as well as of love, of prostitutes as well as of mothers; she called herself 'a compassionate courtesan'; she was represented sometimes as a bearded bisexual deity, sometimes as a nude female offering her breasts to suck; and though her worshippers repeatedly addressed her as 'The Virgin,' 'The Holy Virgin,' and 'The Virgin Mother,' this merely meant that her amours were free from all taint of wedlock. Gilgamesh rejected her advances on the ground that she could not be trusted; had she not once loved, seduced, and then slain, a lion?

"It is clear that we must put our own moral code to one side if we are to understand her. Note with what fervor the Babylonians could lift up to her throne litanies of laudation only less splendid than those which a tender piety once raised to the Mother of God:

I beseech thee, Lady of Ladies,
Goddess of Goddesses, Ishtar, Queen
of all cities, leader of all men.
Thou art the light of the world,
thou art the light of heaven."

Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, p. 235.

So much for Ishtar! One historian cites an official census of the gods and goddesses worshipped in the ninth century B.C. They counted 65,000 of them! Most of the gods lived in temples and made nocturnal visits to pious women and helped increase Babylon's population. There is a famous paragraph in the writings of Herodotus that begins, "Every native woman is obliged, once in her life, to sit in the temple of Venus, and have intercourse with some stranger."

Later in our studies we will learn of Alexander the Great, who died in a drunken orgy. He also studied Herodotus and was shocked by the immorality of Babylon.

In ancient days, defeated peoples and civilizations were exiled to extinction. They exchanged their defeated gods for the "superior" gods of their conquerors. This was the beginning of assimilation. The defeated wanted only to survive; it didn't matter much to them whether they survived as Canaanites, Hittites, or Phoenicians. They were willing to lose their religion or national identity; they only wanted to live. This is evidently what had happened to the ten northern tribes of Israel.

Why didn't it happen to Judah? The philosophers of history have no answer. In fact, one of them, Arnold

Toynbee, was so frustrated by the persistence of the Jewish people that he called them a "fossil" nation! *Fossil!* It's fascinating to observe that one of the exiles, Ezekiel, used a similar figure of speech.

"Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them, I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord'" (Ezek. 37:11-14).

Why did the Jews persevere in a situation where mightier nations perished? Fourteen centuries before the exile, "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to

The exile itself was clear proof to many Jews that Jehovah was but one of the gods worshipped in Babylon. Their mental and spiritual states were deplorable. The Babylonian system was so depraved that one historian cites an official census of the gods and goddesses worshipped in the ninth century B.C. They counted 65,000 of them!

the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:1-3).

It has always been God's will that all men everywhere honor, love, worship, and obey Him. God's purpose in calling Abram was that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through [him]." When the Jews were exiled to

continued on next page

He who sees the Babylonian exile as merely punishment misses one of the greatest truths of history. Even in the midst of their suffering, God still loved them and remembered His covenant with Abraham: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Babylon, they began their worldwide dispersion. While they occupied their own land, they frequently sinned and lapsed into idolatry, and God sent them one prophet after another.

"But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward" (Jer. 7:24). God punished them. In Babylon they saw idolatry at its worst. Many had abandoned their faith in Jehovah and lusted with the goddesses of Babylon. But not all! "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1). This remnant remembered the warnings of God's prophets, and they also realized that the exile was God's punishment for their idolatry.

In the exile this penitent remnant was transformed. God put iron into their spines. From that time on, there may have been individual and momentary lapses into idolatry, but never again did the Jewish nation lapse into idolatry. They abhorred it.

When a Jew in the twentieth century sees Christendom genuflect to what he calls idols, he is reminded of the abomination of Babylonian mysteries. We must show them that this is not biblical Christianity!

But he who sees the Babylonian exile as merely punishment misses one of the greatest truths of history. Even in the midst of their suffering, God still loved them and remembered His covenant with Abraham: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The Jews were exiled not only to Babylon, but throughout the Babylonian world. Wherever they were, they blessed their pagan neighbors. They did not worship idols; they worshipped Jehovah. They honored their fathers and mothers; they also honored and loved their wives and families.

They met together on the Sabbath and studied the Law and the Prophets. Wherever there was a Jewish community, there was an island of praise to Jehovah in the midst of a sea of immorality. In their adversity, God proved His faithfulness to His Word.

As we study this story of God's faithfulness, we will learn how God dispersed His people throughout the world to areas that became Persia, Greece, Egypt, Syria, and Rome. We will learn how they formed colonies in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossia, Thessalonica, and other areas, so that all people everywhere were blessed through them.

We will also see that if the Jews had not been dispersed throughout all nations, the Book of Acts, and the Letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians would never have been written. We will see history's greatest example of how the Lord "disciplines those he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6). Above all, we shall see that the kings of mighty nations do not control history—the King of kings does!

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Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I was always under the impression that John died on the island of Patmos and Mary in Jerusalem. Then I came across a book entitled *Ephesus: Legends and Facts* by Dr. Toksoz, who suggests John and Mary both died in Ephesus. Is he right?

ANSWER: The exact whereabouts of the graves of both John and Mary are unknown to us. Neither Scripture nor history has seen fit to reveal them.

The notion that John was present on the island of Patmos is supported by Scripture (Rev. 1:9). Presumably, John died there, but this is not stated.

Mary's death in Jerusalem is suggested by the fact that the last mention of Mary locates her in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). In addition, it is clearly

stated in Scripture that John fulfilled Jesus' instruction to care for His mother (Jn. 19:26, 27). Thus, it is highly unlikely that John would separate Mary from her family and friends in Jerusalem to go with him to Ephesus. More probably, he remained with her in Jerusalem until her death. This would also explain why his Gospel and letters were written so much later (A.D. 95) than the rest of the New Testament.

The suggestion by Dr. Toksoz that both John and Mary died at Ephesus is possible, but not likely. His evidence rests upon late tradition, a letter to the people of Constantinople from Pope Celestin I (A.D. 422-432). This is about 340 years after the death of John, perhaps as much as 380 years after the death of Mary. This is not a very trustworthy tradition.

QUESTION: What were the blessings said over the bread (matzah) and the wine in Matthew 26:26-29?

ANSWER: The blessings that Jesus said are not recorded in the New Testament. But if He prayed the traditional Hebrew blessings recited at Passover over the bread (matzah) and wine, He would have said the following over the wine: "*Barouch Atah Adonai Elohenu Melech Haolam, boray, peri, hagafen,*" which means, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."

Over the bread, He would have said, "*Barouch Atah Adonai Elohenu Melech Haolam, Hamotzi Lechem Min Ha-aretz,*" which means, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."

For more information about introducing your Jewish friends to the Messiah, please contact a regional director near you

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