

Principles for Surviving Suffering from the Book of Revelation

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- **Principle #1:** *Keep Jesus in View*

The book of Revelation opens with a dramatic portrait of Jesus as the great high priest. This portrait drives the dialogue between Jesus and the seven churches of Revelation 2-3. Hence, it appears that this view of Jesus is necessary for the church to address its practical problems. There is a second portrait drawn in chapter 5 of Jesus as the Lion/Lamb. His suffering as the Lamb of God is precisely what qualifies him to be the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This image is a strategic preface for the suffering unleashed in chapters 6-9. Hence, it is the view of Jesus' suffering which enables us to bear our own. Finally, Jesus is depicted as a victorious warrior in chapter 19; this, of course, precedes the end-times discussion of chapter 20. There is obvious confusion and debate about the meaning of this chapter. What is clear is that Jesus the warrior carries us through the confusing times of suffering in the end. Thus, wherever there is suffering in Revelation it is prefaced with a clear portrait of Jesus. Keep your eyes on him.

- **Principle #2:** *The Sovereignty of God*

If this book tells us anything, it is that God is in control of human history as well as those supernatural elements that invade our space. For example, 13:10 acknowledges the suffering of the saints but puts it under the sovereign control of God. Likewise, 13:5 says the beast was given a mouth with which to utter blasphemies. Only God gives things in Revelation. Hence, Yahweh is responsible for allowing the beast to blaspheme. Both the suffering of the saints as well as the blasphemy and persecution brought on by the beast(s) is due to God's permissive will. While this is disconcerting at one level (a good God allowing evil to transpire), it is comforting at another level in that God will not allow things to get out of his control. This world is not as chaotic and arbitrary as it seems. Your suffering has a purpose and it is likely more for the glory of God than your personal growth .

- **Principle #3:** *God is Kenotic*

The Greek word *Kenosis* means "to be emptied or abased". This is certainly true about Jesus, but there is evidence that each member of the Trinity shares kenotic experiences (cf. Zech 12:10; Eph 4:30). Chapter 5 shows the kenotic suffering of Jesus in this poignant imagery. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is called for but what comes out is actually the Lamb who has been slain. It is a striking reversal. We must look closely at the lamb and we will see several important things (a) The lion is great because he was a suffering lamb. (b) You cannot say God does not understand my suffering, because he suffered **before** you. (c) He not only suffered before you, but also he suffered **for** you and he also suffered **because** of you.

- **Principle #4:** *Everyone Suffers*

There is a pattern of suffering in Revelation; in particular, there are three cycles of suffering: the seals (6-7) describe the suffering caused by humans, the trumpets (8-9) describe the suffering caused by natural and supernatural disasters, and the seals (16) described the

suffering caused by God himself. In the middle of the Trumpets (9:4) no one with the seal is to be harmed by the locust. In other words, Christians suffer like the rest of humanity up to this point. But then our suffering ceases because of this invisible mark of God on us (7:1-8). We must thank God for the seal of the Spirit which spares us unbelievable suffering in this world.

- **Principle #5:** *The wicked will have hell to pay for their wickedness*

Throughout the book one of the recurring themes is the terrible suffering God will impose on those who refuse to honor him as God. In 6:15-16, the kings of the earth call for the rocks to fall on them. In 17, the Harlot is devoured by beast she rides on and the ten kings that shared a bed with her. In 18, there is a choral refrain of woes from those who bought into the world's systems. In 19 there is a devastating battle where God's enemies are devoured by the birds of the air. And in 20 there is a lake of fire that consumes all the wicked of all time, culminating in the destruction of the unholy trinity of the Dragon, the Beast(s), and the Harlot.

- **Principle #6:** *Reward for the Faithful (ch. 21-22)*

The description of the New Heaven and the New Earth are metaphoric symbols of a reversal of Eden where intimate fellowship with God will be restored, where our bodies will be renewed, where we shall be done with tears and corruption. This image of the New Jerusalem is a sustaining image during the current suffering of God's faithful.

- **Principle #7:** *God's suffering saints are Christ's kingdom and priests on earth now (ch. 1 and 5), in heaven during time (ch. 20), and in the New Heaven and New Earth in eternity (ch. 21).*

We are portrayed as a nation of priests. This image is borrowed from the Exodus community (Exo 19:5-6; see 1 Peter 2:9) and recurs throughout the book (1:5-6; 5:9-10; 20:6; 22:3-5). We are positioned by Jesus as priests who suffer for the nation as he did as High Priest before us. This is our task and this is our glory, to suffer as he did to bring redemption to the world. Our suffering does not deny our special position before God, it confirms it.