

International Bible Lessons
“Teaching the Truth in Love”
Sending International Sunday School Lessons and Bible Studies Around the World
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

What Is The Cause of Our Suffering?

The *International Sunday School Lesson* for Sunday June 22, 2008
Hebrews 12:1-13

“Consider [Jesus] who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3—NRSV).

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3—KJV).

Everyone goes through periods of suffering. Sometimes this suffering prompts us to ask “why,” to seek a reason or cause for our suffering. Sometimes false comforters, such as those who went to Job while he suffered, will say, “There must be some unconfessed sin in your life. If you repent, God will relieve your suffering. You are suffering God’s punishment for your sins.”

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews was not a false prophet or simplistic comforter. He certainly knew that sometimes we suffer the natural consequences of our own sins. The Bible calls this type of suffering the reaping of what we have sown (Galatians 6:8).

He also wrote that we suffer when sinners afflict us unjustly. When suffering, he wants us to think of Jesus. Jesus, who never sinned, suffered unjustly at the hands of sinners. He suffered unfairly, and sometimes believers will suffer unfairly too. Jesus foretold that His followers would be reviled and persecuted on His account (Matthew 5:11-12). Therefore, believers should not be surprised when they suffer persecution from others for doing the right thing or saying what they must say to right a wrong. Indeed, when suffering for doing what is right in following Jesus, the Bible encourages believers to “not grow weary or lose heart.”

When they sin, believers will sometimes suffer the discipline of their heavenly Father. Though this discipline feels painful, “later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Believers can find encouragement from such discipline when they remember that God is treating them as the children He loves. — Copyright 2008 L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Questions for Further Thought or Class Discussion

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Think about your answers to the questions below before your Sunday school class meets, discuss in class, or use for further study. In some cases, I do not always write the questions to have a definitive right or wrong answer. In most cases, the questions should encourage everyone to think about how to apply biblical truths to their daily lives. Before beginning to answer the questions below, read the entire Scripture lesson in your favorite translation or compare translations. Write your thoughts in the space provided and take them to your Sunday school class for discussion.

1. Read Hebrews 12:1. Who are some of the witnesses that surround you? When you think of their names, how does this make you feel? How can they help you live a more faithful Christian life?
2. How is Jesus both “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”? Compare Hebrews 12:2 in some other Bible translations? Which translation speaks to you the best? Why?
3. Why did Jesus “endure” hostility from sinners? Why did sinners act with such hostility toward Him? Why did some of the most religious people of His day act hostile toward Him?
4. Explain this statement: “Endure trials for the sake of discipline” (Hebrews 12:7).
5. If you know with certainty that God is disciplining you, what should you do and how should you feel? What is there about suffering God’s discipline that can encourage you? Why should you be careful about telling someone that he is suffering God’s discipline? How could you tell them without sounding similar to Job’s comforters?

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