

Session 11

# The Sufferings of Israel

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## A. Introduction

1. Jewish people — both ancient and modern — have been one of the most persecuted people groups in history. They have faced discrimination at the hands of both regimes and societies in general.
2. Gentile believers need to view the sufferings that the Jewish people go through from a Biblical perspective and an understanding of God's heart and dealings towards Israel. Without this perspective, what the Jewish people have gone and will go through will not make sense.
3. The past 1000 years have seen intense persecution of Jewish people in various nations:
  - a. Between the 1100s and 1800s, Jewish people were targeted and expelled from cities across medieval Europe thousands of times.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, "pogroms" took place in the Russian Empire where Jewish people were singled out, persecuted, and killed simply for being Jewish.
  - c. During the Holocaust in World War II, six million Jewish people — about two-thirds of the total Jewish population in Europe — were killed under the "Final Solution" by Nazi Germany that sought to annihilate the Jewish population across the continent.
4. The sufferings of the Jewish people are inexplicable and will remain a mystery without an understanding of the spiritual issues involved.

## B. The Sources and Reasons for the Sufferings of Israel

### **Primary source: Satan and the Powers of Darkness**

1. The Bible is clear that the primary and real source of Israel's sufferings is Satan and the powers of darkness.
2. Taking into serious consideration the history of Israel and what Jewish people have gone through, her sufferings have no earthly or human explanation.
  - a. There is something outside of this world that is attempting to destroy the Jewish people and has influenced men and women over centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/who-are-jews-jewish-history-origins-antisemitism/>

- b. The hatred and resolve of Nazi Germany to annihilate the Jewish people was irrational and inhumane. The Jewish people were painted as “children of the devil” and “murderers of mankind” in Nazi school propaganda.
    - c. It was Julius Streicher (a major part of Hitler’s propaganda machine) who wrote, “He who helps to bring this (the crushing of the Jewish people) about helps to eliminate the devil, and this devil is the Jew.”
  3. As Israel has been called to play a vital role in God’s plan for world redemption, the demonic realm knows that her destruction will mean the end of God’s plan.
    - a. She is God’s chosen vessel to bring the revelation of God and salvation through Jesus;
    - b. The redemption of mankind is bound up with the survival of the Jewish people. Thus, Satan will always seek to destroy and annihilate Israel.
  4. Satan also knows that the Second Coming of Jesus and the fulfilment of world redemption are dependent upon Israel’s preservation, restoration, and redemption due to the responsibility and inheritance promised to her.
    - a. Israel’s great responsibility means that she will have a great inheritance:
      - i. Spiritual inheritance — She was given the revelation of God’s Word, the Covenants and the Messiah (Rom. 9:1–5; Jn. 4:22).
      - ii. Physical inheritance — She has been given the land as an everlasting possession. This was promised through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants.
      - iii. Royal/Kingly inheritance — God has promised to exalt Israel as the chief nation in the earth (Isa. 60:1–3; 2:1–4; Jer. 3:17; Mal. 3:17). However, this inheritance is dependent upon two events:
        - Physical restoration — Her restoration to the land;
        - Spiritual restoration — Her return to the LORD through her Messiah Yeshua.
    - b. The devil understands the significance of the full restoration of Israel (Acts 3:18–21) both physically and spiritually. Thus, he will constantly endeavour to destroy Israel. If he cannot annihilate Israel, he will delay her acceptance of Jesus as her Messiah.
  5. The Bible contains examples of Satan’s attempts to annihilate and destroy the Jewish people through human agents:
    - a. In Exodus 1:16, the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the killing of all Hebrew male babies and Scripture describes Egypt as an “iron furnace” — a place where Israel was in the fires of persecution (1 Kings 8:51).

- b. During the period of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great (king of Judea) ordered the killing of an entire generation of Jewish children below the age of two (Matt. 2:16) because he feared the prophecy about the "King of the Jews".
- c. In Revelation 12:13–17, Satan (symbolised by the dragon) will once again persecute Israel (symbolised by the woman) at the End of the Age.

**Secondary source: Israel's Own Rebellion Against God**

1. The Bible also points to God's judgement and discipline of Israel as a result of her own rebellion against Him, resulting in her suffering at the hands of pagan nations that He has used for this purpose.
2. Israel's unique position as God's chosen nation and the covenants that God has made with her puts a certain responsibility on her as a nation. She has a responsibility to be faithful to God, walk in His ways, reflect Him to the world and make His name great on earth.
3. Unfaithfulness to God would mean correction, discipline, judgement, and chastisement, as laid out in the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant.
  - a. Deuteronomy 28 lays out the blessings and curses of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai.
  - b. Many of the Old Testament prophets were sent by God to call Israel back to Him after their straying away from Him.
  - c. Unfortunately, Israel did not heed these prophets and was largely stubborn and unfaithful to God throughout her history. Thus, God brought judgement and correction upon her. Her two exiles (i.e. 586 BC and AD 70) are to be interpreted in this context.
  - d. The destruction of the temple before both exiles symbolised God's displeasure of her. They both happened exactly on the same day — the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av.
  - e. Jeremiah 30:10–11 expresses God's corrective measures against Israel's rebellion.
4. Thus, Israel's own sin, disobedience and rebellion have also contributed to her own sufferings.
5. However, the pagan nations that God has used as His rod of discipline have also sought to further God's judgement against Israel beyond the boundaries of what He had intended, and for this, God has and also will judge and condemn them (Zech. 1:14–15).

### **C. God's Use of Israel's Sufferings**

1. God has and will use Israel's sufferings as a means to purify and refine her.
  - a. In Malachi 3:2–5, Scripture reveals that God will come against His people for judgement because of their sin against Him. He will refine and purify her until she is a holy nation that is a worthy vessel for her call.
  - b. Through her sufferings, He will establish Israel as a nation that is filled with humility, purity, righteousness, and gratitude.
  - c. Isaiah 6:11–13 speaks of the cycles of judgement that Israel will go through. At the same time, these verses reveal that there will always be a remnant (a "stump") of Israel that remains, that will ultimately emerge as the "holy seed" who will be a worthy vessel to partner with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom.
2. God can use Israel's sufferings to bring about His purposes in context of His redemptive plan.
  - a. It is likely that if the Holocaust had not happened, there would not have been sufficient political will worldwide for the formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948.
  - b. While it can be difficult and confounding for many to grasp this in light of Israel as God's chosen nation, He ultimately allowed the Jewish people to go through the Holocaust and subsequently turned the evil that was meant for them for their good (Gen. 50:20).

### **D. Conclusion**

1. Despite the sufferings that Israel will go through, Scripture promises that they will one day come to an end.
2. The reality is that even though she will undergo intense persecution in the End Times (Zech. 12:2–3, 13:8–9, 14:2; Rev. 12:13–17), there is coming a day when her warfare will be ended and she will be established as a light to all nations in the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 40:2, 2:2–3, 4:3).