

SHATTERED FAITH

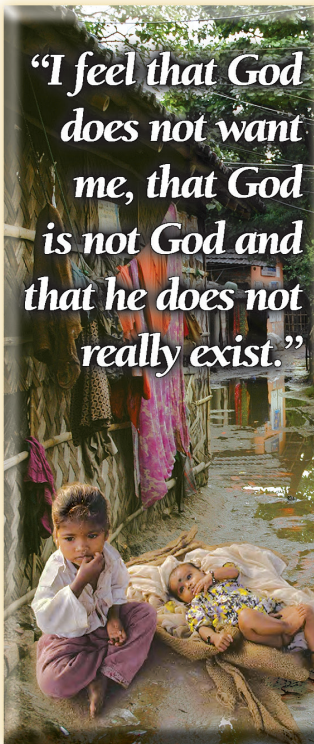
“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” — Romans 10:17

The news about Mother Teresa’s shattered faith has sent a shock wave throughout the Christian world. How could one who was so devoted to God and the poor have been so much in doubt about her faith? Her words, in newly revealed personal letters to a friend, express the agony of her heart and her sense of spiritual abandonment for the last 50 years of her life: *“I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer... there is nothing, but emptiness & darkness... I have no Faith... If there be God... emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.”* The popular daily newspaper of Rome, *Il Messaggero*, reported: *“The real Mother Teresa was one who for one year had visions and who for the next 50 had doubts—up until her death.”*

We can only imagine the sorrow and despair this servant of the poor must have witnessed in Calcutta, India—the endless suffering of millions with no prospect of relief in sight from either God or men. Could it have been this that challenged her faith even to the very core?

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH... TRIED BY FIRE
 1 PETER 1:7

This conflict between faith and unbelief is the great reality of the time in which we live. Never before in human history has so much tragedy been witnessed in so vivid a display to so many. News events are broadcast as soon as they happen—hurricanes, earthquakes, famines, sickness, murders, terrorism and every imaginable evil. Even more disheartening are news reports filled with the



“I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist.”



hypocrisy of those who were supposed to be faithful pillars of the church and loving shepherds of the flock—their crimes against the innocent have now been exposed and add an even greater burden to the weak in faith.

Furthermore, when church creeds offer no reasonable explanation as to why God permits unrelenting suffering, it is not surprising that even the most noble can sink into deep spiritual despair. Truly, there is a growing faith famine in the land. Amos 8:11

At times like these, we must question, not our faith, but what foundation our faith is built upon. Have we placed our trust in an institution, a catechism of church doctrine or a person? If so, this faith will most definitely be challenged, for God desires that those who worship Him, worship in spirit and in truth—a truth that is founded upon His Word, not the traditions and creeds of men.

For faith to survive the storms of life we must seek to know God’s character, plans and purposes as revealed in His Word. Indeed, truth—a faith based upon knowledge—is the *shield and buckler* of a child of God. (Psalm 91:4) Unfortunately, some church doctrines teach that our status with God is based upon the *works* that we do. Certainly *works* are important, for as it is written, *“Faith, if it hath not works, is dead...”* (James 2:17) However, *works* are not the foundation of our faith, but part of the structure that

builds upon a strong foundation of the knowledge of God's plans through His beloved Son. A faith built upon "wood, hay and stubble" will *not* withstand the fiery experiences of life which shall surely test our faith in God. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

WHY HAS GOD PERMITTED SUFFERING?

To believe in God, one must develop in *faith* and learn that He *is* loving and wise—providing all things for man's eternal welfare. God, whose character is supreme love, would not have *permitted* 6,000 years of evil to reign over His creation without a useful purpose and, ultimately, a grand outcome. 1 John 4:8

To understand why God permits suffering, we must first realize the difference between *permitting* and *causing*. God has *permitted* man to have a *temporary* experience with evil, but He did not *cause* the evil. No, Satan, the "god of this world" is the *great first cause* of all evil in the universe. He is the unrelenting enemy of God and God's creation. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2

Our Heavenly Father desires mankind to live in peace, health and happiness, but He now *allows* Satan to have his rule of evil in order that each individual may learn valuable lessons—experiencing the results of evil and selfishness. Thus we read, "This sore travail has God given to man to be exercised therewith." (Ecclesiastes 1:13) As an illustration, although parents will try to intervene at times when a child ventures off onto a dangerous path, often, it takes the hard lessons of a rebellious life to learn that trust and obedience would have saved much pain and suffering. Just as the loving parents were waiting—ready to take back the child with love and open arms—so, God is long-suffering with humanity. He knew that Adam and Eve would not comprehend His warning about sin and its dire consequences. Out of love, God formulated a plan whereby Adam's disobedience might provide a valuable, though difficult, lesson.

FREE WILL: A HARD LESSON

From the beginning of creation, God desired the human family to experience the privilege of *free will*. This liberty of choice has, of necessity, been a hard lesson. The planetary systems move in mechanical obedience; the animal creation is driven mainly by instinct; and God could have programmed the ideal man to be blindly obedient, but man would be no better than a robot. Instead, God created man in His own image, with the ability to love and obey by choice. Because of the vivid lessons provided by the cruel

consequences of disobedience, man is learning why obedience to God is the only option for happiness. Ultimately, under the more favorable circumstances of God's Kingdom, man will *choose* to love and respect his fellow man and his environment. More importantly, he will joyfully render love, respect and perfect obedience to his Creator—trusting in His gracious provisions.

The third chapter of Genesis is the divinely provided history of man's free will. God instructed Adam and Eve that if they

practiced righteousness, they would live forever. If they disobeyed, then death would be a process of sorrow and suffering culminating with the grave. This sorrow is what Mother Teresa witnessed continually, and not understanding the permission of evil is what may have driven her to doubt. Had she a knowledge of God's plans and purposes, perhaps her faith would not have faltered.

WAITING FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN AND DEATH

Discovering how and when God will end the suffering in this world and set up His Kingdom is critical in abating our doubts about Him and His plans. Mother Teresa's prayers for the sick and dying will be answered, but like Cornelius, the Gentile convert who had to wait for the appointed time to have his prayers answered, Mother Teresa's prayers must wait for an appointed time. 1 Timothy 2:6 speaks of Jesus' death as "a ransom for all to be testified in due time." See Matthew 10:5, 6; Acts Chapter 10

This ransom makes possible two primary phases of God's redemptive plan. The first is the selection of Christ's Church which is taking place now. The test of faithfulness, under adverse conditions, is one of character refinement to the end that each might be able ministers in God's Kingdom to those who were not capable of accepting Christ now. Note the words in Acts 15:14-17: "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name [the true church]. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue [remainder] of men might seek after the Lord..."

Note the point that a small group, "a people for His name," is selected *first* out of the Gentiles. During the Christian Age, the Lord is only converting a few, a "little flock" "who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality." (Romans 2:7) These are elsewhere symbolically referred to as the bride of Christ. Next, the "tabernacle of David," which was

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an Old Testament illustration of the Kingdom of Christ, is set up again. After Christ returns, these believers are united with him, and their work will be the conversion of *“the residue of men”* [the rest of mankind—NAS version]. Revelation 22:17 prophesied of that time: *“And the Spirit [the returned Christ] and the bride [the true church] say, Come [to the residue of men]. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that thirsts come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

The second phase of God’s redemptive plan comes to the *residue* of mankind—the vast majority who went down into their graves without hearing the truth of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12) In her compassion, Mother Teresa spent every ounce of her energy to help the poor of Calcutta, India. But, the few in her small sphere of influence were merely a handful compared to the billions who have lived and died in sorrow. What of those? It will soon be God’s *due time* for lifting the lost and dying race up from the grave and onto the path which will lead to health and happiness.

HOPE BEYOND THE SUFFERING

Jesus tells us in John 5:28: *“Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good to a resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment.”* (RSV) Note again the same pattern of sequence. All will be raised from the dead, but first, *“they that have done good,”* the true church. During Christ’s return they will be raised to spiritual life and united with their heavenly Lord. Then will follow the resurrection of the *“evil”* class, all the remainder of men who, through unfavorable circumstances, did not accept Jesus’ sacrifice. These will come forth to a *“resurrection of judgment.”* The King James Bible, translated in A.D. 1611, grossly mistranslated the word *“judgment”* with the word *“damnation.”* The American Revised Version in 1881 used the word *“judgment,”* and no translation since has used the word *“damnation.”* The trial time, or *“due time,”* for the church is in this present life, and they gladly accept the ransom price paid on their behalf. But the trial time of the remainder of mankind will be at their resurrection in the Kingdom. There will be no obstacles in the way of salvation during the glorious reign of Christ and his Church. Isaiah 35:8-10

God’s Kingdom to come on earth, with Christ as King, will bring to mankind a time of restoration and renewal. Satan will be restrained during this thousand year Kingdom, and righteousness will be the rule rather than the exception. *“For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”* (Isaiah 32:17; Revelation 20:2; Isaiah 11:9) This will be the first real chance for mankind to know their loving Creator under

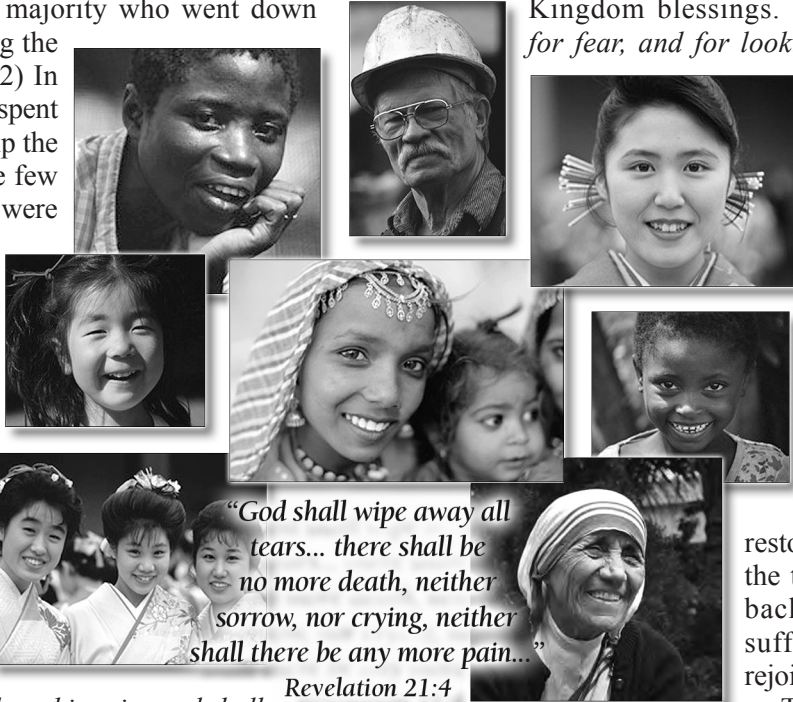
ideal circumstances. Everyone will then have a fresh start in life—a new life. If obedient, they will live forever, and having learned, by experience, that *“the wages of sin is death,”* the vast majority will want no more of sin and death—they will learn to love righteousness. Romans 6:23; Isaiah 26:9

SORROW AND ITS EVERLASTING LESSON

It is the severity and hopelessness of the world’s problems that prophetically mark the threshold of the promised Kingdom blessings. *“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth [shattering faith]... when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”* (Luke 21:26, 28) Just as urban renewal requires demolition, so the full establishment of Christ’s Kingdom requires removal of an old, corrupt society. (Hebrews 12:27) At the end of the thousand-year age of restoration, mankind will stand at the threshold of eternity, looking back upon this present life of suffering and sorrow, and will rejoice in the hard lessons learned.

The Prophet Jeremiah sends a message of consolation for every grieving heart: *“Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for... they [the poor groaning creation] shall come again from the land of the enemy [the grave].”* Oh, what a compassionate God we have! The Apostle Paul states that God *“comforteth those that are cast down.”* (2 Corinthians 7:6) He has provided ample assurance in His Word that His chastenings are rehabilitative so that His *“beloved”* wayward children might be restored back to His loving favor. (John 3:16) Yes, God chastens to heal! *“...they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors [Satan, sin and death], and He shall send them a Saviour, and a great one, and He shall deliver them... and the Lord shall smite [chasten] Egypt [a picture of the world]: He shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them.”* Isaiah 19:20, 22

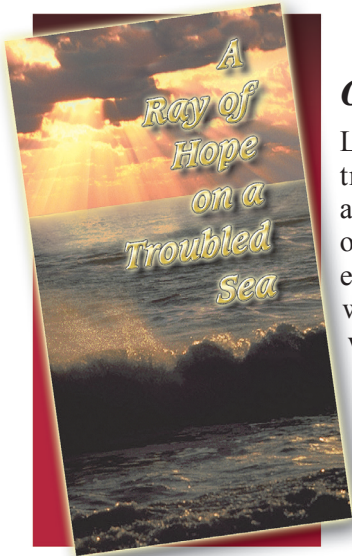
The permission of evil and suffering will have been a useless torment unless mankind is given an opportunity to use this experience to make positive choices at some future time. The Scriptures promise that those who are resurrected in God’s thousand year Kingdom on earth will return to the days of their youth to begin again! (Job 33:24-26) All the troubles and tribulations of the past, instead of being useless sufferings, will be valuable guides. Death, the penalty for sin, is not the irrevocable end of human existence; *it is the final experience of an everlasting lesson.* Isaiah 25:6-9



“God shall wipe away all tears... there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...”

Revelation 21:4

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