



## General Topics :: Seeing the Bible Thru Persecuted Eyes

### Seeing the Bible Thru Persecuted Eyes - posted by Mattie, on: 2007/12/8 9:29

"Seeing the Bible through Persecuted Eyes"

Brother Andrew's ministry

Taken from 16 reasons why I should encounter Persecuted Christians ([www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org))

I need to encounter persecuted Christians because they help me to interpret my Bible better.

"The Bible is not an easy book to interpret," said my New Testament professor, "otherwise why would we have fought so many wars over its meaning?"

I remember my Church History professor shaking his head and saying ruefully: "One of the saddest features of church history must be that it was over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper that Christians shed the most blood."

Every pastor knows it is hard to understand the meaning of the Scriptures. They labour to learn languages, use concordances and consult commentaries, all in the hope of shedding more light on the key questions of interpretation: Who wrote this text and what did they mean by it? Who initially read this text and what did they make of it?

All good interpretation begins with the tools that answer these two primary questions. We are taught that these tools lie in the realm of scholarship, and most pastors take to their studies and their libraries accordingly.

But there is another vitally overlooked "tool" that gives the key to the meaning of the Scriptures - the Persecuted Church!

The Persecuted Church of today represents the closest we can come to the original writers and readers of the Scriptures.

Most of the Bible was written by persecuted people for persecuted people. By interacting with them, we gain unique insights into the original meaning of the Scriptures.

We need their help because what is obvious to a persecuted, biblical Christian is no longer obvious to us.

We inhabit a completely different universe from that of the New Testament writers. We need the persecuted to remind us of what life was like for the first-century faith community.

There are three key characteristics persecuted Christians of today share with the biblical church, and which we emphatically know little of:

#### Persecuted Christians Have No Future

Having a future is a luxury that most persecuted Christians do not enjoy, either in the biblical period or today. They have no long term.

What they read and use, they use in the moment. They need to hear from God urgently because tomorrow their life may be required of them. And they live and act with little regard for consequences.

How different to us, who demand so much ministry on how to live in the world long term.

#### No stake in their society

We live in a world where the church was - and in some cases still is - privileged; where Christian language and concepts have shaped our history and where individual Christians can hold high office.

We are comfortable, well connected and prosperous.

But biblical, persecuted Christians were always on the outside of the power structure. Peter called them "strangers and aliens."

The Scripture is written for powerless people.

Religious rituals

Persecuted Christians live in societies dominated by religious rituals. This is what gets them into trouble - they do not worship the "emperor." Even in atheistic societies, persecuted Christians are in conflict because they do not worship the "gods" of the age, whether the god is Mao, Lenin or Castro.

But we live in worlds where the role of religion has been relegated to the private sphere. We are not required, like our biblical persecuted forebears were, to take oaths of allegiance and fealty to state gods or other gods.

Thus persecuted Christians enable us in some small way to recover the "original eyes" of the first writers and readers of the New Testament - and that can make all the difference to a correct or an incorrect interpretation.

I remember a dear pastor from the West preaching about Jesus stilling the storm (Mark 4:35-41). His whole talk was on how Jesus could still the storms raging in our lives.

He named storms like loneliness, misunderstanding, humiliation and even persecution. And he said: "Jesus can deliver you from every one of these storms, just like he did the disciples of old."

The pastor was about to go on when an old man stood up. He was from a Middle Eastern country and had seen much suffering.

He said gently and respectfully: "My dear brother, if you had been persecuted, you would know the primary meaning of this passage.

"The point of this story is not that Jesus takes the storm away, but that there is no need to fear the storm if Jesus is in the boat."

Everyone stared at him in silence. He added: "This passage is given to us for our comfort in the face of terrible storms, to know that Jesus is in the boat with us so that the storm will do us no harm."

Not many appreciated the interruption. But some years later, at seminary studying this passage, I saw the value of his insight.

Scripture's intended audience

Mark's Gospel was not written to Christians who were being delivered, but to comfort those who were dying. It was written to the persecuted Christians of Rome who were being martyred by the hundreds under Nero.

How would they have interpreted this passage? Surely not that they would be delivered out of the mouths of the lions. They didn't. They died in the arenas.

But this passage would have spoken to them even so - they would know that with Jesus, the storm of death would do them no harm.

Even the passage itself makes this clear. Jesus is astonished because the disciples have little faith. They just do not realize who He is. If they did, they would not fear the storm.

So that persecuted Christian - because he was persecuted - knew the meaning of the passage better than the preacher, because he was the one for whom the passage was written.

What a fantastic opportunity we have then. As we interact with the persecuted, our own Bible becomes clearer. They give us the eyes to interpret the Scriptures, which were originally written more for people like them than for people like us.

Of course, the persecuted are not a foolproof tool for understanding the Scriptures. We still need our scholars, our exposition, our encyclopaedias.

But do not overlook the aid of the persecuted in interpreting sacred texts, for they, far more than we, are linked to the world of our biblical ancestors.

**Re: Seeing the Bible Thru Persecuted Eyes, on: 2007/12/8 13:47**

Thank you Mattie. This was very good, eye-opening & timely.

Richard Wurmbrand guaranteed, it wouldn't stay "them". He said he wrote his books to prepare "us". So did God.

**Re: Seeing the Bible Thru Persecuted Eyes, on: 2007/12/8 22:57**

I also thank you Mattie, as I will not forget this context - this idea that the Church should be separate from the world, even hiding from it.

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**Re: How do we understand the Bible?, on: 2014/7/31 21:23**

Several days ago I started a thread entitled "Longing For The Pure Milk of the Word" I wish I had discovered this marvelous thread first.

How do we interpret our Bibles? Do We interpret them through the eyes of 21st century American Christendom? Or have we ever thought that the Bible, particularly the New Testament, was written by persecuted believers for persecuted believers? I believe this thread that was posted in 2007 has some valuable insights.

Blaine Scogin

**Re: The Word as Life, on: 2014/8/1 11:30**

Eric Sanders has rightly observed,

"People whose lives are centered around Christ don't just study the Bible to be smarter. They see that every single page of His Word is stained with the crimson blood of Jesus Himself. Suddenly the Bible isn't just a text to be studied but a source of life for a withering branch."

Quote by Eric Sanders in Buck Naked Faith

Brethren how do we view our Bibles? Do We approach them as a theological religious textbook seeking to prove our favorite doctrinal position. Or do we see the Bible as a source of life for us who are branches abiding in the vine. And no doubt withering.

Can we be as Peter who responded to the Lord when he said "Lord to whom shall we go. You have words of eternal life." (Jn. 6:68). Can we go to the writings of men and expect to find words of eternal life?

In the same chapter quoted above Jesus says the it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. His words are spirit and life (Jn.6:68).

I find it intriguing that the One who said His words are spirit and life reminds us that man lives on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mat.4:4).

From what I have read the persecuted see the word as life itself. The Bible is not just a holy book to be carried to church on Sunday. But it is a book they see as possessing and willing to even die for. They read it voraciously seeking to have Jesus speak to them. His words are life to their souls.

Do We see the urgency of the hour? If we see that persecution will break in America are we devouring our Bibles as if it were heavenly food itself? Truly what will sustain us when the death trains and death camps come? What will sustain us when the guillotine is in front of us? How will we encourage others in their trials and tribulations? Look to the persecuted and you will see the answer. I do guarantee that they are not reading theological works.

Posted by Blaine Scogin

**Re: Mattie - posted by jujashan4 (), on: 2014/8/2 9:44**

Anyone know how Mattie's doing these days? His last login was in 2011.

**Re: Mattie - posted by jujashan4 (), on: 2014/8/2 22:23**

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