

The Role of Human Suffering in Christian Life: A Theological Reflection on Biblical Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of human suffering in Christian life: a theological reflection on biblical teaching. The researcher used secondary data collection that is theological books, articles, and the Bible. The research was carried out in the library of Africa International University. The study adopted the Biblical perspective and Theological reflection of human suffering. The main methodology was a pastoral circle of sharing the experience of different people going through suffering while providing social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral action. Suffering in the Old Testament was linked to the disobedience of the first human beings who were Adam and Eve. This proved that Christians suffer due to their sins and disobedience to God. In some cases, however, suffering is neither a punishment from God nor due to disobedience but is sometimes experienced so that God's name may continue to be glorified. The study concluded that suffering is a core part of a Christian's life and it always has a purpose. God uses suffering to manifest Himself to His people, teach His people a lesson, and glorify His name among nations. Suffering happens to connect Christians with God. Prayer helps Christians to experience suffering with courage and hope. The role of suffering in a Christian's life was to reveal God's presence, power and glory. The study recommended the Church focus more on teaching Christians about suffering so that they should understand the meaning of suffering with perseverance in their Christian walk. The thesis recommended future studies to focus on the role of the church in Christian suffering. This would help to unravel how the Church responds to the suffering of its followers and how it helps in building its followers' faith and development through challenges and suffering. This will help to place the Church in a good position to be partaker of its followers' suffering thus building a strong and permanent relationship with its members.

Keywords: *Human suffering, realities of suffering, Christian life, theological reflection*

1. Introduction

As human beings, human suffering is a fundamental part of our existence. Communities of believers in the body of Christ are not spared from human suffering. John Stott notes that "the fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair."¹ Suffering is seen on a global scale affecting all races and religions. Natural

¹ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*: Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986, 311

disasters like tsunamis, floods, famines, and earthquakes, bring arbitrary and pervasive suffering to the world. World wars through terrorism and bitter conflicts around the world continue to result in suffering for societies and families. We have also seen the recent global disease that has affected the whole world. The disease known as Corona virus (COVID-19) has caused the deaths of loved ones, loss of jobs through retrenchment, pay cuts, and closure of schools, Churches, and businesses.² The agriculture sector has been affected as perishable goods are rotting in the tracks as they wait for COVID clearance.³ In return, many people are suffering due to lack of basic needs and essential services.

Suffering is also seen on the community level due to a lack of essential services like affordable health care, roads, water, and electricity among others. Suffering at the individual level includes sicknesses, rejection, abject poverty, loneliness, rape, barrenness, persecution, injustice, unemployment, disappointment, broken relationships, fierce temptation, disability, bereavement, and unhappy marriages among others. Experiencing these sufferings makes many victims end up in the hands of false prophets and the prosperity gospel preachers who take advantage of them.

The prosperity gospel or theology of prosperity in Africa exploded in popularity over the last two decades and has been researched by several scholars. Adeleye in his book, *Preachers of a different Gospel* noted that the loss of fellowships in the 1970s- 1980s and fundamentals in charismatic churches led to different kinds of doctrines being preached in the early 1990s.⁴ The charismatic groups taught that wealth and health were signs of God's blessing and favor to an individual. Many individuals moved to these Churches because of the many promises made and the provision of hope for a better future. The charismatic preachers and false prophets in the end misused and compromised God's Word so as to enrich themselves. According to Shorter and Njiru in their book *New Religious Movements in Africa*, these charismatic churches started to appear in Kenya in the late 1980s and grew very fast through mass evangelism. The mass media of the United States of America through televangelism helped push this doctrine to a huge network of followers.⁵

Other pioneer scholars like Paul Gifford⁶, Marius Nel⁷ Charles Hummel⁸ asserted that the African prosperity Gospel was funded and influenced by American evangelicalism. Appealing sermons have been the focus on these Churches without mentioning the Biblical role of human suffering in a Christian life. Shorter and Njiru further mention that the women and youth are

² Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) (2020) Business Perspectives on the Impact of the Corona virus on Kenya's Economy, KEPSA, Nairobi.

³ Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) (17 March 2020). Agriculture Sector Business Response to COVID-19, KEPSA, Nairobi

⁴[Femi. B. Adeleye](#) , *The Preachers of a Different Gospel: A Pilgrim's Reflections on Contemporary Trends in Christianity*, Zondervan Academic, 2011

⁵Alyward Shorter and Joseph Njiru, *New religious movements in Africa*, Nairobi, Kenya: Pauline's Publications Africa, 2001,10

⁶ Paul. Gifford, *Prosperity: A new and foreign element in African Christianity*, Religion, vol.20:4, 1990, p 373-388

⁷[Marius. Nel](#) , *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa*: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020

⁸[Charles. E. Hummel](#), *The prosperity gospel : Health and wealth and the faith movement*: Intervarsity Press, 1991, p 15-17

the most attracted to these Churches.⁹ The women are usually after family and marriage stability, financial breakthroughs and fruit of the womb while the youth are after economic independence through well paid jobs and finding marital spouses. Lausanne organization has critiqued the prosperity gospel using *An African Case Study of David Oyedepo*.¹⁰ The organization notes that David O. Oyedepo is a leading promoter of the prosperity gospel in his Winners Chapel Enterprise that has expanded beyond Nigeria to other parts of Africa like Kenya. Due to the declining economy in Kenya in the year 1987, the Winners Chapel gained ground in Nairobi. Oyedepo believes that poverty is self-made and is a curse hence his primary mission and call is to eradicate poverty by making people rich. He uses Malachi 3:6-9 to establish this.

He has written at least forty books and most of them are on how his followers can prosper materially and have good health. They include the *Mystery of the Anointing Oil*, *anointing for breakthrough*, *Keys to Divine Health*, *The Miracle Seed*, *Born to Win*, *Success Buttons*, *Breaking Financial Hardship*, *operating in the supernatural*, and *Covenant Wealth*.¹¹ Oyedepo has no single book teaching on human suffering, contentment or waiting process. He markets a rich Jesus who “has so much that He needed a treasurer to keep His money. He ate whatever He wanted and whenever He desired it. He has in a place that commanded envy because John’s disciples, who went to see where he lived, never returned to their Master.”¹² What Oyedepo and other charismatic preachers have done is to shift the focus of their followers from the true Biblical truth.

Jay Israel a former prophet at the Alleluia Ministries International exposed the occultisms and prosperity gospel in his former church.¹³ According to voice of dominion website “the Alleluia Ministries International was started on the 24th of February 2002 in Lyndhurst, Johannesburg South Africa by Pastor Alph Lukau.”¹⁴ They have branches in various parts of Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, South America and Europe. The Church has television programs around the world that shows people being delivered from demons, people being prophesied to and in return they are asked to sow a seed of money to the ‘altar’ of God. The church members are usually promised material blessings from January to December with yearly prophecies like “2015 is the year of signs and wonders” or “2016 is the year of breakthrough” yet that never came to be for most members.¹⁵

The Church members are also supposed to do certain rituals as instructed by the false prophets in order to cure their sufferings. These rituals involve using anointing oil, anointing water, anointing candle, anointing wrist bands, anointing stickers among others. Jay Israel said that his former church was good at creating spiritual problems like the cause of your suffering is

⁹Alyward Shorter and Joseph Njiru, *New religious movements in Africa*, Nairobi, Kenya: Pauline’s Publications Africa, 2001

¹⁰Femi B. Adeleye, *The Prosperity Gospel: A Critique of the Way the Bible is Used*: 2014 Lausanne Global Consultation on Prosperity Theology, Poverty, and the Gospel, 2015

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²David Oyedepo, *Breaking Financial Hardship*: Dominion Publishing House; 4th edition, 1995, p 107

¹³Chulumanco Mahamba, *Former false prophets lift lid on how cult churches operate in SA*, iol.co.za, 2020 Accessed Feb 9, 2021

¹⁴Biography of Pastor Alph Lukau– Founder of Alleluia Ministries International (AMI) – Wikipedia, voice of dominion.com, 2021 Accessed Feb 9, 2021

¹⁵mylifeas favour ,Jay Israel in tears | reveals his initiation covenant with Alph | moment of truth part 2,Jun 29, 2020, video 40:36, <https://youtu.be/P5EAV8mtIk0>

due to the enemies or witches in your village then they go ahead and create a spiritual solution that only the prophets had the revelation to. He unveiled that there was a formula in the way the prophets in that church worked. They first worked on the emotions of the member and played to their fantasies by saying things like “you shall be married before the year ends” or “you shall receive a miracle in the next forty eight hours” or “you will receive a job by the end of this month” then they instructed a condition that the member had to do in order to receive the promise or prophecy.¹⁶ In the end, some of the members compromised their faith by using their human power and strength in order to get the things that they were promised. Many believers in return became depressed and disappointed in God for not honoring their prayers.

Technological advancements have continued to help push the Gospel preaching around the globe through satellite television, worldwide web, international radio broadcasts and social media platforms. With all these advancements it is sad that many Christians today do not have the foundational knowledge of the Word of God concerning human suffering. This is not because of scarcity of the presentation of truth but due to wrong theological training of those who preach and prophecy¹⁷ and laziness of the hearers to read the Word of God for themselves¹⁸. This then has resulted in the Church not being grounded in the solid biblical foundation. Much emphasis has been put in theology of prosperity and very little in theology of suffering. Christians therefore do not know the role of human suffering in a Christian life.

1.1 Problem Statement

Since no human being is immune to suffering believers in Christ need to know the truth about suffering and be the solution to the world. Most of them know God as a loving God and Him being all-powerful but they do not understand why they go through suffering and pain. C. S. Lewis restated the problem of suffering as seen by the world “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”¹⁹ Philosophers, theologians and believers in Christ have wrestled for centuries with this suffering problem of God been loving, powerful and all- knowing yet He allows suffering to exist. False prophets and prosperity preachers in return have taken advantage of this suffering problem.

Jesus suffered, Paul suffered, Joseph suffered, Job suffered and many other Biblical heroes suffered while being in Christ. Jesus said that those who will follow Him will experience persecution for his name sake.²⁰ James added that as Christians they will “face trials of many kinds.”²¹ The false and prosperity preachers have however preached that “Jesus paid it all”, “it is finished” or “God wants you to be happy” meaning that Jesus paid for all our suffering on the cross hence we are supposed to have a rich and fruitful life. They therefore promise an easy time in the journey of salvation with no suffering and pain. They say things in the end times will be better yet we know that things will be worse as according to the Word of God.²²

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Stanley J. Grenx and Roger E. Olson, *Who needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 9.

¹⁸ Acts 17:11

¹⁹ Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*: HarperCollins Publishers; 1st edition, 2001

²⁰ Luke 9:23, John 15:20, 16:33

²¹ James 1:2

²² Matthew 24:14, 22-24

The prosperity theology “views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity.”²³ The common denominators that are used are wealth, health and success. Pressure has been put on the believers to live like they are blessed so as to shame their enemies. Many have entered in the trap of bitterness and complaining because of not knowing why God allowed suffering to exist in their lives. They say that when a Christian suffers it is because of generational curses, not having enough faith, not performing certain rituals or not sowing enough sacrificial seed so as to provoke the abundance of blessings among others.²⁴ Many Christians have been damaged by their teachings and left confused, depressed, empty-handed and disappointed in God. The Church needs to reach a point where we have more matured Christians. One of the ways of filling this gap is through the knowledge of the true Word of God concerning human suffering. Therefore, this research will focus on investigating the role of human suffering in a Christian life.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the realities of suffering in the Bible story.
- ii. To establish the roles of human suffering in Christian lives.
- iii. To examine how Christian believers cope with suffering.

2. Literature Review

2.1 African Theologians View on Human Suffering

African theologians acknowledge the harsh realities of life affecting both the individual and community. John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Kwame Bediako and Bolaji Idowu are some of the prominent African theologians who have helped to shape the theme of suffering. The theologians’ main aim is to seek solutions to social and spiritual problems that bring about suffering.

John Mbiti was a Kenyan theologian who offered insights regarding suffering that arose from the context of African traditional religion and Christianity.²⁵ His primary experience with suffering started when his younger brother died. This event inspired him on a spiritual journey to bring to light the true meaning of God, faith, and suffering. In the context of African traditional religion, He brought out the connection between the spiritual and physical realms. African spirituality is often connected to ancestral influences or spiritual principalities and powers of the spirit world. Mbiti acknowledged the African belief system regarding spirituality that causes evil and harmful happenings. Mbiti also addressed suffering in the context of Christianity.²⁶ He highlighted the importance of resilience and endurance in the face of suffering as it shaped an individual’s spiritual growth. It also offered a means of transformation and purification echoing the doctrine of redemption through Christ’s suffering. Christians should find meaning and purpose in the midst of adversity.

²³Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*: NYU Press, 2009

²⁴Michael D. Fortner, *The Prosperity Gospel Exposed and Other False Doctrine*: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2011

²⁵John Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

2.2 Philosophers View on Human Suffering

Suffering has been a central theme in Ancient Greek and modern philosophy for centuries, with the philosophers offering diverse perspectives on its cause, nature and meaning to life. Ancient Greeks like Socrates and Plato emphasized the importance of facing suffering justly rather than causing it. Modern philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant and Rene Descartes also offered a range of perspectives on suffering to ways to minimize it.

Socrates of Athens (470- 399 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher, who viewed suffering through the lens of the broader framework of his ethical and philosophical teachings emphasizing on virtue, acceptance, self-examination, and the purpose of life.²⁷ Socrates believed that moral excellence or virtue led to eudaimonia, often translated as “flourishing” or “happiness”. The absence of moral excellence led to suffering. Socrates also believed in the correlation between ignorance and suffering. Ignorance is the root cause of many human problems. Through philosophical knowledge and process of self-examination, individuals can overcome ignorance. Socrates emphasized on resilience and inner tranquility by accepting the things one cannot change. Finding meaning and purpose to suffering encourages growth and self discovery.²⁸

Plato (428-347 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher, student of Socrates, who addressed diverse aspects of suffering in his philosophical dialogues, particularly in relation to pain, psychology, ethics and the nature of reality.²⁹ According to Plato, ignorance is the root cause of suffering. Suffering in the allegory of the cave arises from ignorance and failure to recognize higher truths thus being stuck in a world of appearances, with its imperfections and limitations.³⁰ Philosophy is often characterized by “a dualistic view of reality, distinguishing between the material world of appearances (the realm of the senses) and the world of Forms or Ideas (the realm of eternal, immutable truths). In this framework, suffering is often associated with the material world, which is characterized by impermanence, flux, and illusion.”³¹ Ignorance of higher truths also causes imperfection of our souls, which originally were of the perfect world of forms, but became embodied in imperfect physical forms leading to suffering. A reminder of this imperfection is the physical pain that we experience. We can minimize suffering by using reason to understand the Forms, control our desires and achieve true knowledge to live a more virtuous life. Generally, Plato saw suffering as largely negative, but with some potential for positive outcomes.

2.3 Religious View on Human Suffering

Every religious sect has a historical interest in the origin of human suffering and how to cope with it. Most of these sects face the challenge of explaining the existence of suffering in the world with the view of God’s goodness. The explanations in Atheism, Humanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity of suffering and their origin differ from one another but are also similar in many respects. Human beings are always considered to be the origin of suffering

²⁷Terence. H. Irwin. “The Parts of the Soul and the Cardinal Virtues (Book IV 427d–448e) from the book Platon: Politeia.<https://doi.org/10.1524/9783050089935.89>. Accessed on 12th, April 2024.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹Plato. Plato's The Republic. New York :Books, Inc.,1943

³⁰Book V (The Allegory of the Cave)

<https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/republic/themes/> Accessed on 14th April, 2024

31R. Kraut. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – Plato,

2004: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/> Accessed on 13th April, 2024

and not a deity. This study provided a better understanding of these sects' teachings about the origin and the overcoming of human suffering. Suffering helps the different religions respect their denomination so as to avoid the suffering that comes with disobedience to the outlined norms.

2.3.1 Atheism Worldview of Human Suffering

Atheism believes that suffering originated from the existence of a supernatural being referred to as 'God' who brought numerous hardships and suffering into human being's life that causes them to live a miserable life. Atheists argue that if indeed God loves and is compassionate to mankind, he should have put an everlasting stop to suffering. Atheists believe that suffering is meaningless and should not be occurring in people's lives. Atheist use suffering to advocate against the existence of a supreme and Benevolent God. Atheism strongly believes on survival for the fittest in order for one to survive in this empty and meaningless life.³² They do not believe in the proclaimed God of Christians who is "all powerful, all knowing and all loving". If he was all loving and all good why does he not stop a child from being molested week after week, year after year? Why does he just watch people suffer in the world? Why does he not stop murder from happening yet he is all-powerful? Why in the first place did he create Lucifer if He knew he would deceive the world? Why does he allow the future child molesters and terrorists to be born?

2.3.2 Humanism Worldview of Human Suffering

Humanists attach matters to humans rather than the supernatural or divine. They believe that "suffering is as result of evolutionary immaturity."³³ The cure to suffering is science and education which provide daily solutions. They place their hope on technological advancement. Science has the answers to all their questions such as after life and creation. They base their ethical and moral decision-making on reason. Humans are the only solutions to man's problems. Humanists therefore reject the idea of a deity or a supernatural force that will come to their aid when facing problems or suffering. They are concerned with happiness and human welfare thus it's the duty of humans to support others to live a fulfilling life.³⁴

2.3.3 Hinduism Worldview of Human Suffering

Hinduism believes that suffering comes because of payback (*karma*). They believe that suffering is deserved in what they call 'deserving suffering'. Much human sufferings are as a result of their own actions and previous motives. The response to those who are suffering according to Mahatma Gandhi is to offer kindness and compassion otherwise they will also suffer karmic consequence. Hindus believe in *ahimsa* which is an act of non-violence and kindness to all living things. They also believe in natural disasters which are caused by events played by the gods as part of their cosmic realm. Others believe that natural disasters help to balance the earth for example volcanic soil can be used to grow crops. Others believe that natural disasters are as a result of humanity's bad action in treating the planet.³⁵ The Bhagavad

³²[Kyle, Richards](#), As an atheist, why do you think there is pain and suffering in life? quora.com. Accessed on November 28, 2020

³³*Humanism*, Non Religious views- GCSE Religious studies: Bbc.co.uk. Accessed on November 28, 2020

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵*What does Hinduism teach about evil and suffering?* GCSE Religious studies: Bbc.co.uk. Accessed on November 28, 2020

Gita “encourages readers to 'detach from the world' and appreciate that everything is just part of an eternal cycle. The role of humans is to do as little harm and as much good as possible so that they may escape this cycle.”³⁶

2.3.4 Buddhism Worldview of Human Suffering

Buddhism believes that suffering is an illusion. The root cause of suffering is desire. When you remove a certain desire, it equals to removing suffering. The Buddha’s teachings include the ‘Four Noble Truths’ that he taught to his first disciples after an enlightenment experience. These truths include “*Dukkha* - the truth of suffering, *Samudaya* - the truth of the origin of suffering, *Nirodha* - the truth of the cessation (end) of suffering and *Magga* - the truth of the path to the cessation (end) of suffering.”³⁷ There are also three types of suffering in Buddhism: the suffering of painful experiences (*Siddhartha*, after leaving the palace saw three people: a dead person, an ill man and an old man. This taught him that the world is full of suffering), suffering caused by constant change and the truth of suffering (caused by not being enlightened).

2.3.5 Islam Worldview of Human Suffering

Islam believes that suffering is determined so you have to accept your fate. Following certain religious disciplines can help eradicate suffering. They believe in *fitrah* which is the inner sense of knowing good and evil. In the farewell speech of prophet Muhammed, he warned about Shaytan by saying “beware of Shaytan, he is desperate to divert you from the worship of Allah, so beware of him in matters of religion.”³⁸ Shaytan (devil) brings temptations. Evil and selfishness of human beings cause suffering and bad decisions. They believe Allah gave them free will to choose between right and wrong. Following Allah’s path or guidance can help overcome suffering or ease the suffering of others. This path is written in the Sunnah and Quran. Sura 2:38 says “If, as is sure, there comes to your guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” Muslims believe that this life is a test of what is to come after we die hence they must endure suffering for the preparation for paradise. Those who remain firm in their faith will be rewarded. Allah will forgive those who sincerely repent just as he forgave Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. Allah commands that Muslims practice mercy, justice and forgiveness to others hence when they see people suffering they should extend mercy and when they see evil they should practice justice.³⁹

2.3.6 Christian Worldview of Human Suffering

Christians believe that in the beginning, God created the world and there was no sin, suffering or death. Suffering was not part of God’s original plan and order as seen in Genesis 1 and 2. In this good world, God walks with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden indicating a perfect relationship with each other. God then gave Adam and Eve a simple command “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”⁴⁰ Robin Routledge explains, “this command allowed human beings to play an active part

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *What does Buddhism say about the origin of evil?* GCSE Religious studies: Bbc.co.uk. Accessed on November 28, 2020

³⁸ *What does Islam teach about evil and suffering?* GCSE Religious studies: Bbc.co.uk. Accessed on November 28, 2020

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Genesis 2:17

in their relationship with God. It gave a choice: obey God's word and maintain the relationship, or disobey and reject the relationship. This shows that God wants a relationship with human beings that is entered into freely. It also emphasizes that a key element within that relationship is obedience."⁴¹

2.4 Early Church Fathers view on Human Suffering

The Early Church Fathers, from the first to fifth centuries AD, grappled with the problem of suffering in a world faced with persecution and hardships. Persecution from the Roman Empire gave the early Christians the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to God and potentially achieve martyrdom, a path to eternal glory. Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage are some of the Church fathers who contributed to the theme of suffering.

Polycarp (AD 69-155) dealt with the expression of grief due to the "suffering and straying" member named Valens. This suffering was not due to physical suffering, persecution or death but was due to Valens sinful behaviors.⁴² Polycarp became concerned with reconciling Valens to the Church. The early Christians were more concerned with the suffering caused by persecution but Polycarp understood that there were other several types of suffering that the early Church had not tackled. Justin Martyr (103-165) dealt with the two contrasts of suffering between a believer and a non-believer. This is in his First Apology book. The believer will be freed from suffering of persecution into eternal pleasures with God. The non-believers will suffer God's punishment since they are concerned with pleasure on this earth hence it is separate from the doctrines of Christ.⁴³ The same kind of suffering is also mentioned in Justin's Second Apology. He urges believers to endure suffering in a world that is hostile to Jesus teachings. Suffering is only temporary.⁴⁴

2.5 Role of Human Suffering in Christian Lives

Not all human suffering is caused by sin for example the story of Job in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament. Tim Keller argues that Christianity is different from how the other worldviews handle their suffering problem. He argues that "While other worldviews lead us to sit amid life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy."⁴⁵ Christianity does not console but restore.

2.5.1 Old Testament; The Book of Job

Job in the Bible was an extremely wealthy man who lived at Uz. He had a large family of seven sons and three daughters. The meaning of Job is "object of scorn" or "persecuted". His story begins with an argument from Satan challenging God that no one will truly obey Him unless their selfish motives are satisfied. The response from God was "the Lord said to Satan, 'Have

⁴¹ Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 147.

⁴² Paul Hartog and Polycarp, *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp*: New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 49.

⁴³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *The Fathers of the Church*. volume 6, translated by Thomas B. Falls. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948, 57.

⁴⁴ Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, in *The Fathers of the Church*. Volume 6, translated by Thomas B. Falls. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948, 8.

⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*: Penguin Books; Reprint edition, 2015, 31

you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?”⁴⁶ God used Job to disapprove the allegations of Satan that human beings feared God and shunned evil because of the things God gave them.

God permitted Satan to inflict Job with all kinds of suffering in his household and everything he had except touching his soul. The Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’ So, Satan went out from the presence of the Lord”⁴⁷ Therefore the oxen and donkeys were stolen by the Sabeans and also they killed the servants except one who went to Job to report what happened. The sheep and the servants in another field were killed by the fire of God that fell from the sky. The camels were carried away by the Chaldeans and servants killed. His sons and daughters who were feasting and drinking were struck by a mighty wind and the house collapsed on them. Lastly, Job was struck in his flesh and bones with painful sores. Job lost his possessions, his family, his health, and even his will to live.⁴⁸

2.5.2 New Testament; The Gospel Books to the Book of Revelation

Jesus is shown in the Gospels as the “Son of God” and also as a “suffering servant”. Tim Keller argues that “Jesus is the ultimate Job, the only truly innocent sufferer.”⁴⁹ He suffered yet He did not sin.⁵⁰ The compassionate suffering of Jesus involved: emotional suffering, relational suffering, physical suffering and spiritual suffering.⁵¹ Examples of emotional suffering of Jesus include John 11:33-35 which says that Jesus saw Mary and the other mourners weeping because of the death of Lazarus and he also started weeping and grieving. Luke 19:41-42 outlines how Jesus wept over Jerusalem as they were clueless on what was to come. Matthew 26: 37-37 says that as Jesus went to pray at Gethsemane grief and sorrow overwhelmed him because He knew what was to come hence he urged his disciples to keep watch and pray. Mathew 27:20-23 says that the people shouted that they wanted Jesus to be crucified and Barnabas set free. I could imagine the betrayal and hurt Jesus felt because just days ago He healed and delivered them from various sufferings.⁵²

The relational suffering of Jesus includes Mark 14: 37-38 where Jesus found his three disciples, Peter, James, and John sleeping instead of praying for what was to come. The three were supposed to be the closest friends to Jesus yet they could not discern the importance of keeping watch and praying. Mathew 26:31-35 says that Peter would deny Jesus three times. At the crucifixion, all Jesus’ friends including Peter fled away instead of being there for Him. The physical suffering of Jesus included Mark 14:65 where some of the councils spat on Jesus, blindfolded him, and hit him. Matthew 27: 27-31, 35 says that they stripped off Jesus’ clothes and crowned him with a thorny branch on his head. They also mocked him. Lastly, the spiritual suffering of Jesus included Mark 14:65 whereby Jesus wished that the cup of suffering would be taken away from him. Mark 15:34 notes that Jesus cried out “*Eloi, Eloi,*

⁴⁶ Job 1:8

⁴⁷ Job 1:12

⁴⁸ Job 1–3

⁴⁹ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*: Penguin Books; Reprint edition, 2015, 293

⁵⁰ 1 Peter 2:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵¹ Dilworth, John. (2020). *Theology of suffering*: Africa International University.

⁵² Ibid.

lemasabachthani?” which meant, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’. Suffering can occur without sin. It can be a season of testing of faith just like the life of Job.⁵³

3. Findings

3.1 Models of Suffering in the Old Testament

Friedrich Nietzsche in 1987 argued that the problems of mankind were not necessarily “suffering itself” but “instead the fact that there were no answers to the questions that arose at that particular period. Suffering is a core part of Christians’ experience hence they must discover Christ’s love amidst their suffering. Christians should pray for God’s guidance to distinguish between those sufferings that ought to be avoided, those that require to be embraced moderately, and finally those kinds of suffering that God allows to be experienced by Christians for their sanctification. There are various models of suffering in the Old Testament outlined by various scholars which will help Christians understand the different models of suffering that exist thus helping them to appreciate the wisdom of God, Christ and the churches they fellowship at.⁵⁴

3.1.1 Retributive Model of Suffering

This is also considered as judgemental suffering. God uses this model to govern the world, God is righteous and just hence man’s righteousness will be rewarded and his unrighteousness punished by the supreme God. The Old Testament stipulates that the basic choices of life for every human being are good or evil and life or death.⁵⁵ When the sufferer fails to obey and respect the existing rules and norms they face the basic choices of good or evil, life or death. This kind of misfortune is experienced when a Christian indulges himself or herself in sin that forces God to bring about His supreme judgement. Retributive suffering model remains to be part of the unique moral order of the universe.

Retributive justice as a theory of punishment focuses on direct intuitive support, its claim provides a perfect account of when punishment is more justifiable than alternative options of punishment and in part argues to link punishment to deeper moral principles. Retributive justice plays a crucial role in theorizing about punishment with its notion of desert and proportionality, the normative status of suffering and the ultimate justification for retribution. Its concept is well understood as that form of justice committed to three principles: those who commit specific wrongful acts and paradigmatically serious crimes morally are expected to suffer a proportionate punishment; it is intrinsically morally good with no reference to other goods that might emerge if some legitimate punisher serves them the punishment they deserve; and it is morally impermissible to punish the innocent disproportionately large punishments on wrongdoers.

Globally, it is argued that those who commit wrongful acts, especially serious crimes should be severely punished despite punishing them and producing no other good. Retributivism shares the sense that it is impermissible to both inflict punishment on those who have not committed any wrongful act and to inflict disproportionately extreme punishments on those who have committed some wrong. Retributivism justifies punishment better than

⁵³Ibid

⁵⁴Kaiser Jr, Walter C. "Eight kinds of suffering in the Old Testament." *Suffering and the goodness of God* (2008): 65-78.

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 30:19

consequentialism presupposes that punishment is justifiable and there are no alternatives that are better than both.⁵⁶

3.1.2 Disciplinary/Educational Model of Suffering

This model of suffering is a constructive type of experience for Christians' growth and shaping of their character into a Godly behaviour. It does not happen due to misconduct or rebellion against God's command. God often allows affliction to His people to teach them to obey and glorify Him. Solomon in the book of Proverbs urges his son not to despise the chastening of the Lord nor resent His rebuke, as the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in.⁵⁷ Therefore, God will forever discipline any man or woman whom He loves through suffering, pain, and anguish.⁵⁸ Christians experience suffering through sickness which causes continual strife in their bones and body, they receive persecution and discrimination of their faith and are killed, their buildings and churches attacked by their enemies, unjustly arrested, imprisoned, and abducted. Despite all the pain Christians go through, they must know and accept that no other person would teach be so caring and loving to them than their God in chastisements. The 2021 reports of the World Watch List (WWL) revealed that over 50 countries in the world, Christians are mostly persecuted for following Christ. However, when the suffering and persecution are over and God has fully allowed their faith to be tested, it yields great joy, peace, and testimony to those who usually undergo the testing. The Old Testament portrays prophets as suffering servants of God, especially prophet Jeremiah in his role as the messenger of God had such abuse heaped on his head as he always delivered God's message to the people without falsehood or adulteration.⁵⁹ This kind of suffering is evident in today's society as Christians encounter them on a daily basis and it was evident according to the report by World Watch List in 2023.⁶⁰

3.1.3 Vicarious Model of Suffering

It is a type of suffering model experienced mostly by prophets who are the messengers of God. They always encounter suffering, abuse, and persecution from the people they are sent to by God to rescue them from the coming destruction. This model of suffering is encountered all through the Old Testament. Vicarious suffering is well seen through the prophet of God in the book of Isaiah whose suffering was linked to Israel despite him being an Israelite and coming from the Judah nation. The servant did not suffer for himself but for the sake of others.⁶¹ The book of Isaiah clearly explains deeply the demonstration of vicarious suffering of the servant of God. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and his wounds we are healed.'⁶²

There are numerous instances where humans take the place of another. In the book of Exodus where the law of recompense is extracted, a life taken was to be compensated by the taking of

⁵⁶Carlsmith, Kevin M., and John M. Darley. "Psychological aspects of retributive justice." *Advances in experimental social psychology* 40 (2008): 193-236.

⁵⁷Proverbs 3:11

⁵⁸ Proverbs 13:24; 15:5

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 8:18-21

⁶⁰Joseph, Jo. "Christian Persecution in Worldwide—detailed observation in the top 50 countries." *Available at SSRN 4399873* (2023).

⁶¹Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

⁶²Isaiah 53:5

the life of the offender.⁶³ The Levites took the possession of serving God at the sanctuary, though the issue of suffering in their service to God was not mentioned.⁶⁴ In Exodus 32; 31-35, Moses offered himself to suffer for the consequences of the disobedience and sins of Israel's apostasy. His offer was then denied by God and to respond to him God said, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book'. In Deuteronomic history, a guard is given the responsibility to guard a captive, a prisoner of war⁶⁵, and a minister of Baal in 2 Kings 10:24. The guards were to uptake their responsibilities with their own lives and in case of an escape, their lives were to be used in repayment. Since no captive escaped, the threat remained unaccomplished but is rather used to exercise and predict the death of Ahab in 1 Kings 20:35-43 which was viewed as a consequence of ignorance and disobedience to put the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad to death. This shows that a human would experience vicarious suffering in place of another in the form of punishment by death.⁶⁶

3.1.4 Empathetic Model of Suffering

This is a type of model that proves that suffering and grief affect not only the sufferer but it extends to those whom the sufferer knows and loves. This model of suffering also affects God as His compassion and remorse feeling are always aroused by the sin of His creatures. This causes Him to cry out with a roar and with threatening judgement as in Amos 1:2. Isaiah 63:9 explains that in their affliction, the Lord is always afflicted and due to His unending love and pity He redeemed them. This showed that the pain Christians inflict on God is beyond bearing and He was never interested in the Israelites dying hence He urged them to turn from their sinful nature and live.⁶⁷ God spread out His hands as a distraught parent and asked how He could give up on Israel. The Lord promises not to carry out His fierce anger and He will not come to destroy.

Naomi with her two daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah when they were set to return to Bethlehem after the death of her husband Elimelek and her two sons Mahlon and Kilion. Naomi expressed an empathetic suffering model when she told her daughters-in-law, 'No my daughters it is more bitter for me than you because the Lord has turned His hand against me'. Naomi felt the sphere of suffering more than her two daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah when she told them to go back to their parent's home because there was no hope of Naomi remarrying and having big sons who would re-marry the daughters-in-law. Orpah kissed Naomi and bid her goodbye but Ruth refused to leave Naomi and promised to follow her wherever she would go.⁶⁸

3.1.5 Evidential/Testimonial Model of Suffering

This is a kind of intense suffering that occurs to Christians and despite the extreme suffering they don't doubt nor abandon God. Job experienced severe suffering from Satan but despite all the temptations, mockery, and abuse, he refused to abandon God even after his wife advised him to curse God and die. Job proved that mortals always serve the Almighty God out of their pure heart and love. It doesn't matter what they own or might possess out of their obedience

⁶³Exodus 21:13-14

⁶⁴Numbers 3:12

⁶⁵1 Kings 20:39

⁶⁶Geyser-Fouchè, Ananda B., and Thomas M. Munengwa. "The concept of vicarious suffering in the Old Testament." *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019).

⁶⁷Ezekiel 18:31-32

⁶⁸Ruth 1:8-18

but they forever express their faith and love to God despite the situation they encounter. Satan thought that Job served God because he was God's fair-haired boy who had prospered so much and had been protected by God hence wouldn't stop serving God because of the blessings God had showered him. God then allowed Satan to put Job to the test but spare his life. It was not only Job who was on a test but also God. Job triumphing over Satan meant that God won the battle over Satan and this proved that Christians will serve God whether they prosper in life or not. God permitted Satan to test Job's allegiance by destroying all the massive possessions he owned including his health and family. Despite all the trials from Satan, Job still expressed his love and faith to God by not falling into the devil's traps.⁶⁹

Prophet Habakkuk's life also demonstrated the testimonial suffering model. Prophet Habakkuk complained to God about the immense increase of wrongdoing, violence, and destruction in Judah without any judgement and God consoled him that He would deal with the evil Himself. God continued to bring retribution on the Babylonians, a feared, pagan national enemy. Habakkuk kept complaining to God of how the wicked people kept harassing the men who were more righteous than themselves but God did not answer him instantly. Habakkuk then admitted that the just shall live by faith but the prospect of invasion of the Babylonians tore him up inside as a prophet of the Lord and a man full of faith, he promised to rejoice in the Lord his Savior.⁷⁰The Evidential/Testimonial suffering model comes with extreme evidence of testimony from the faithfulness of the Lord. Testimonial suffering is always used by God to bring Christians into a deeper knowledge of Him so that they can develop a personal relationship with their creator.

3.1.6 Revelational Model of Suffering

God uses suffering to bring Christians into a very deep understanding of Himself. Prophets Hosea and Jeremiah exhibited a true context of Revelational suffering. God told Hosea to marry a promiscuous and adulterous woman whom he was to have children with. Hosea then married Gomer daughter of Diblaim and they had a son together whom they named, Jezreel according to God's command. The son's name meant that the Lord was soon going to punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel thus putting an end to Israel's kingdom. Hosea together with his wife were blessed with three children, two sons and a daughter. Hosea together with his family endured severe testing of marriage. Hosea received numerous mockeries, insinuations and slurs concerning his wife who gave him love in prostitution to Baal, and the idolatrous worshippers who kept interrupting prophet Hosea's public ministry. Hosea publicly on many occasions declared to still loved his promiscuous wife and would take her back home at any given time. Hosea used his wife's example to explain to the people that they too were committing various acts of sins to God just like his wife yet God still loved them. Hosea did not tire of from calling people to repent. Revelational suffering is depicted in Hosea's life when Hosea keeps loving his wife despite her being unloving and promiscuous.⁷¹

3.1.7 Doxological Model of Suffering

Suffering does not only happen as a consequence of Christians' sins or to teach believers a lesson but it also happens to manifest God's purpose and glory. Doxological suffering serves the purpose of honouring the supremacy of God. Joseph serves as a primary example of this

⁶⁹ Job 1-2

⁷⁰ Habakkuk 1-3

⁷¹ Hosea 1-2

kind of suffering. Joseph the son of Jacob was sold to Egypt by his brothers due to jealousy. Joseph's brothers had only intended evil to happen to their brother leading to his death but for the glory of God Joseph endured all the misery and enslavement in Egypt including spending several years in prison. Joseph underwent all the suffering to later save nations including his own family from the famine that took seven continuous years. The text of Genesis 50:20 outlines it clearly, 'You intended evil on me, but God intended it for good to accomplish the saving of the lives of many from hunger'. Joseph suffered not because of his own sins but God allowed it only for His glory.

3.1.8 Eschatological/Apocalyptic Model of Suffering

The prophets of God expect that God will permit a certain period of extreme suffering moments before coming to the tail end of the historical Eon. The scriptures indicate that when it seems the very lowest times and Christians have despaired of all their hope, that is when the Kingdom of God always emerges in its very glorious moment in the universe. The intense sufferings of the people of Israel, God's chosen people came to a climax through the exodus which happened under Moses and Aaron the servants of God. God exchanged the momentary sufferings of the people of Israel for the joy of their restoration. The protector of Israel came up to comfort His people in their suffering from slavery and put an instant end to the shame and misery they experienced.

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego refused to bow down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar's idol of gold which was sixty cubits high and wide. The king placed the idol high on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon and summoned all the governing authorities including the governors, treasurers, satraps, and all the provincial officials to bow down and worship the idol image he had set up. Everyone in Babylon obeyed the king by worshipping the idol except the three servants of God, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego. The king summoned the three men who were later thrown in a furnace that had been heated seven times hotter than usual and ordered the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego and then throw them into the blazing furnace. The furnace was so hot that its flames killed the soldiers who threw the three men into the blazing furnace. Immediately the king noticed four men dancing in the blazing furnace and was shocked because only three men were thrown in the fire tied but they ended up being a total of four men in the blazing furnace. The king identified that the fourth man looked like the son of God. King Nebuchadnezzar then decided to praise the God of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego and ordered all the nations to worship that God. He also promoted the three men in the province of Babylon.⁷²

3.2 Models of Suffering in the New Testament

The New Testament explains suffering is one of the integral experiences Christians must encounter in their spiritual life. Suffering has been evident in various contexts under the New Testament. Paul in Romans 8:17 outlines that Christians suffers together with Jesus and that suffering eventually leads to everlasting glory. Christians are usually afflicted in numerous ways. The various models of suffering in the New Testament are explored below.

3.2.1 Righteous Model of Suffering

The righteous model of suffering is a kind of innocent suffering that occurs not because one sinned but because one is innocent but has to suffer for the sake of others in order to accomplish a purpose. This model of suffering encourages Christians to stand firm with Jesus and his

⁷² Daniel 3:1-30

gospel. Matthew 23:35 proves that Jesus' blood was among the righteous bloodshed on earth. Everyone who wishes to experience a godly life in Christ must experience persecution even in their current life.⁷³

Jesus the son of God endured suffering in His life on earth for the sake of the love He had for Christians. Jesus encountered bodily suffering, emotional suffering, humiliation, and death. Jesus endured all forms of suffering for the sake of redeeming all Christians, this later transformed suffering thus giving it a purpose hence this assures Christians that despite any kind of suffering they face, they undergo it with Christ who is very much aware. Jesus while in the garden of Gethsemane experienced emotional disturbance of taking the burden of Christians' sins which caused Him to sweat blood. He experienced sorrow, anxiety, and extreme fatigue of nervous due to the crucifixion he was going to face. Jesus Himself went through suffering and He understands it well when Christians go through the same and He gives them the strength and faith to persevere through the pain and humiliation which later bears fruits for the Christians.⁷⁴

3.2.2 Innocent Model of Suffering

This is a model of suffering that Jesus experienced. He did not sin, neither did he commit any wrong but he had to suffer. Jesus received power and strength from God to oppose the torments of innocent suffering. Innocent suffering is among the sufferings that are very horrible as one understands that they are suffering not because they have committed any wrongful act but because its according to God's will for them to encounter suffering in their Christian life. Jesus underwent bodily suffering when his flesh was ripped off from his body. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot who handed him over to the crucifiers. He was crowned thorns, received all kind of humiliation, was insulted by a mock of coronation just for the sake of saving all mankind. Christians also experience the same kind of humiliation Christ received, ridicule, gossip, and attacks on their Christian and personal reputation including false judgement that lands them in prison or rejection by the community.

Jesus was forced to carry the cross that was to be used for his crucifixion he fell three times on the way because of exhaustion. Simon of Cyrene was forced to assist Jesus in carrying the cross. Simon didn't have any other option but to assist, having a close and deep encounter with Jesus along the journey and this forever changed his life together with his family. Simon of Cyrene's sons later came to be popular and known to the entire Christian community for their faithfulness. The crucifixion of Jesus the son of God proves that he also went through death which is part of the human condition. Jesus faced death as a way of showing free submission to his Father's will. Jesus obedience transformed the curse of death into a blessing. Christians are urged through the suffering of Christ to unite their suffering to his as Jesus is the son of God who gives purpose to all suffering that Christians undergo. The church should rejoice in

⁷³Marcus, Joel. *Jesus and the Holocaust: reflections on suffering and hope*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017.

⁷⁴Scherschligt, J. (2023, March 16). *Five Kinds of Suffering | Categories and Different types of suffering* — *School of Faith*. School of Faith. <https://schooloffaith.com/rosary-archive/five-kinds-of-suffering>

their sufferings for the sake of Christ, they are required through their flesh to complete whatever is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body.⁷⁵

3.2.3 Demonic Model of Suffering

Demonic affliction still exists even in the present world. Satan is ever at work and he keeps causing harm to Christians and all humankind. The devil distracts Christians' lives which results in demonic suffering in various forms including torment, accusations, emotional and physical injury, deception, and finally death. Sometimes Christians find it a bit hard to discern demonic suffering as often, Satan is ever blamed for any evil that Christians experience even due to their own bad decisions.

Jesus after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Satan knew that Jesus was hungry after fasting for many days and nights and he requested Jesus to turn stones into bread if indeed he was the son of God. Jesus conquered Satan by informing him that man shall not live on bread but on every word that comes from the Lord. Satan then took Jesus to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the temple then tempted Jesus to throw himself down because he is the son of God, God would provide angels who would protect him from any physical injury should he throw himself down. Jesus also replied, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Satan was still not convinced and he again took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him the kingdom of the whole world and their splendor. Satan then promised to give everything that Jesus could see if he bowed down and worshipped him. Jesus chased Satan away and told him that only God should be worshipped and served. Jesus used the scriptures to defeat Satan by all the three temptations he had tested Jesus with.⁷⁶

3.2.4 Providential Model of Suffering

Suffering sometimes happens to Christians to teach them a lesson about God to increase the worship and glory of God. God usually has more greater purpose for allowing providential sufferings that are sometimes discerned in Christians' lives. Christians are often persecuted for their faith, they endure suffering for the sake of Christ for no reason just because they have expressed their faith in God. Apostle Paul was persecuted and killed for his faith in Christ. Paul is an example in the New Testament who was persecuted due to his faith in Christ but didn't abandon Christ even when he faced death. Philippians 1:29 encourages Christians to undergo persecution for Christ's sake to be partakers of His eternal glory in heaven and to later receive crowns of Jesus' promises to all Christians who believe in Him and persevere the suffering to the end.⁷⁷

Christians are normally hated by the world for Christ's sake. In Matthew 24:9, Jesus Christ confirms that believers will be hated by all nations just because of Him resulting in them having many enemies of this world who will seek to persecute them in any way possible and kill them for Christ's sake. Christ encourages Christians that they are blessed if they face persecution for His sake as their inheritance and eternal life are in heaven and can't be compared to the temporary earthly suffering experienced in the world.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Mathew 26-27

⁷⁶ Willmington, Harold. "The Temptation of Jesus Christ." (2017).

⁷⁷ O'Reilly, Matt. "Paul, Apostle of Pain: "One of Us-ness" and the Question of Suffering in 2 Corinthians." *Journal of early Christian history* 12, no. 1 (2022): 80-95.

⁷⁸ Mathew 5:11

Christians also endure hardships and trials for being followers of Christ.⁷⁹ When a Christian is unable to endure the hardships that come with being a believer, then it clearly illustrates that he/she doesn't understand what a true Christian involves. Christians should be aware that once they declare to be a born-again Christian, they immediately start to encounter trials of their faith in various kinds that will work on tempting their faith in Christ. Jesus Christ in John 12:25 urges Christians to be willing and ready to die for Him by hating their lives so that they may save their lives by inheriting eternal life. Revelations 2:10 explains that in an instance where a Christian is not willing to die for the sake of Christ, they risk losing their crown of Christ. The gospel encourages Christians to be faithful to Christ unto death.⁸⁰

3.2.5 Existential Model of Suffering

Christians participate in Christ's abandonment on the cross. This model relies on the ground that Jesus undid the rebellion of original sin and death by dying on the cross. This is a kind of suffering that is guided by the Holy Spirit, when Christians fully embrace it, it leads to their divinization in Jesus Christ their Savior.⁸¹ Paul and James in the New Testament wrote much concerning suffering especially for Christians. James 1:2-4 and 1:12 encourage believers to take suffering very positively. James was aware of what suffering produces hence he had a strong passion for encouraging Christians to go through the suffering they encountered with a positive mind. Believers should always react with joy when they undergo any form of suffering as those are some of the ways God uses to measure and perfect their faith. Suffering produces maturity and endurance as stated by James. Christians and believers who endure Christ's suffering are considered blessed by James.⁸²

James mentioned sufferings that were more than religious persecutions when he outlined that the trials were of many kinds. This applied to the many sufferings Christians experienced in this wicked world which include loneliness, bereavement, sickness, false accusations, being misinterpreted and misrepresented, and being tortured or even killed for what they would utter. Christians are always urged to face challenges and sufferings with courage. James urges Christians to undergo illness, poverty, unpopularity, financial constraints, sorrow, and betrayal with joy that Christ is together with them in their sufferings. Jeremiah, a prophet in the Old Testament suffered opposition from the people he was sent to by God to proclaim the good news, Ezekiel a servant of God endured bereavement while Hosea a faithful servant of God suffered a marital breakdown as he married a promiscuous wife.

3.2.6 Mysterious Model of Suffering

God in some instances decides not to reveal why Christians and believers suffer. God as the creator never had an intention for His creation to suffer. Sometimes Christians' foolish choices of sin and rebellion lead to suffering and persecution. Jesus Himself suffered more than any human being or believer has suffered. He was rejected by the teachers of law, and endured humiliation, injustice, and shunning by the governors and priests. Jesus expects His believers to expect the same from society.⁸³ Christ suffered because of mankind's sin and so should

⁷⁹ John 12:25

⁸⁰Funchess, James Davis. "Application for the Sake of Transformation: A Study of Thomas Manton's Categorical Approach to Sermon Application." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023.

⁸¹ James 1:2-12

⁸² James 5:11

⁸³ Mathew 5:44-45

Christians be ready to encounter the same. Jesus' flesh was torn was torn to ribbons, and iron spikes were used to slam into his hands and feet as Jesus suffocated to death at the cross together with two thieves beside him.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 confirmed that a true leader and follower of Jesus perseveres suffering. Paul himself as a true servant of God was imprisoned, stoned, and endured beatings, shipwreck, and hunger. Paul together with his missionaries suffered physical ailments and abuse from the society. Paul had a thorn in his flesh and on three different occasions, he pleaded with God to get rid of it with no avail. God did not remove the thorn because He intended that He wanted Paul to believe and depend on Him as God and not on himself.⁸⁴ Some authors argue that Paul suffered due to his lack of faith yet Paul died for his beliefs. 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; 17-18, 'Those who claim anyone with enough faith will be healed must believe they have greater faith than Paul and his fellow missionaries.' It is noted that whomever God uses mightily, He wounds deeply hence Christians should be willing to suffer for Christ.⁸⁵

Jesus Himself condemned sin but never did he condemn suffering. This means that Christians are entitled to suffer any kind of suffering that comes their way. Jesus had great compassion for the less fortunate in the society. He spent most of his ministry with the sick and the poor. Paul's letter to the Corinthians stipulates that Christians inherit their sufferings of Christ along with the future glory of Christ. Christian's temporary suffering leads to multiplied and everlasting glory.

3.3 Summary

The Fourth Chapter of this thesis focused on Christian's response to suffering. Suffering models were well outlined both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. It was evident that the problems of mankind were not necessarily suffering itself but the fact that there were no solutions to the problems that were at hand. Suffering was proved to be a core part of Christian's daily living hence they had no alternative but to seek Christ's love amidst their suffering. The chapter outlined the various and different suffering models that will help Christians to appreciate the wisdom of God and Christ.⁸⁶

The suffering models in the Old Testament included:⁸⁷ retributive suffering model which is used by God to govern the world; Disciplinary/Educational suffering model, a constructive type of experience for Christians' growth and for shaping their character into a Godly behaviour; Vicarious suffering model is experienced mostly by prophets who are usually used as God's messengers who encountered suffering, abuse and persecution from the people whom God sent them to rescue; Empathetic suffering model proves that suffering and grief affect not only the sufferer but it extends to those whom the sufferer knows and loves; Evidential/Testimonial suffering model which occurs to Christians and despite the extreme suffering they don't raise any doubt on their God; Revelation suffering model is used to bring Christians into a deep understanding of God; Doxological suffering model outlines that suffering does not only happen as a consequence of Christians' sin or in order to teach believers a lesson but happens to manifest God's own purpose and glory; Eschatological/Apocalyptic

⁸⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

⁸⁵ O'Reilly, Matt. "Paul, Apostle of Pain: "One of Us-ness" and the Question of Suffering in 2 Corinthians." *Journal of Early Christian History* 12, no. 1 (2022): 80-95.

⁸⁶ Kaiser Jr, Walter C. "Eight kinds of suffering in the Old Testament." *Suffering and the goodness of God* (2008): 65-78.

⁸⁷ Deuteronomy 30:19

Suffering model outlines that the prophets of God expected God to permit a certain period of extreme suffering moments before coming to a tail end of the historical Eon.⁸⁸

Suffering was evident in various contexts in the New Testament.⁸⁹ The various suffering models in the New Testament included: The Righteous suffering model which is kind innocent suffering that occurs not because one sinned but because one is innocent but has to suffer for the sake of others to accomplish a purpose; Innocent suffering model was experienced by Jesus, he did not sin, neither did he commit any wrong but he suffered for the sake of mankind; Demonic suffering model is a kind of suffering where the devil distracts Christians' life which eventually results to demonic suffering; Providential suffering model happens to Christians to teach them a lesson about God to increase the worship and glory of God; Existential suffering model where Christians participate in Christ's abandonment on the cross and finally the Mysterious suffering model which explains that God in some instances decides not to reveal why Christians and believers suffer.

4. Conclusion

Human suffering is part of life. Christian faith and the grace of God help Christians understand that suffering does have a purpose.⁹⁰ God uses suffering to manifest Himself to His people, teach His people a lesson, and glorify His name among nations. Despite understanding that suffering is always present in Christians' life. Christians must understand the meaning and purpose of suffering. Suffering happens to connect Christians with God.⁹¹

Jesus in 2 Timothy 2:8 encourages Christians to persevere suffering because he understood that Christians must encounter suffering because even Him as the son of God also underwent suffering. He was persecuted though he didn't commit any sin hence His followers were also definitely eligible to encounter persecution. God provides grace and power to Christians to overcome suffering, trials, and tribulations. Prayer helps Christians to experience suffering with courage and hope. The role of suffering in a Christian's life was to reveal God's presence, power, and glory. Christians are to remember the purpose of suffering and the one being served whenever a tempting situation attacks their life.⁹² God's servants such as Paul and Job suffered for the proclamation of the gospel and the glory of God. Christian's patience is always tested through suffering and challenges so that they can harvest the reward of righteousness and peace. Christians should not be ashamed but praise God that they are His followers and they suffer together with Christ.

Christians believe that in the beginning (Genesis 1:1-10) God created mankind with no intention for them to experience any form of suffering or pain but through mankind's disobedience to His commands. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, God introduced extreme measures of suffering to all mankind.⁹³ Israelites' disobedience and rebellion to God led to curses. God's patience, tolerance, and mercy over the Israelites brings

⁸⁸Proverbs 13:24; 15:5

⁸⁹Marcus, Joel. *Jesus and the Holocaust: reflections on suffering and hope*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017.

⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 3:3

⁹¹O'Reilly, Matt. "Paul, Apostle of Pain: "One of Us-ness" and the Question of Suffering in 2 Corinthians." *Journal of Early Christian History* 12, no. 1 (2022): 80-95.

⁹² 1 Peter 4:19

out the clear writings of the scripture that the Lord is always patient towards His people and does not wish anyone to perish but wishes all to reach repentance.

5. Recommendations

This thesis explored the matters pertaining to the Role of Human Suffering in the Christian life. The study systematically evaluated various instances in which Christians' encounter suffering in their life and the purpose of the suffering they encounter in their daily lives. The research study therefore gives its recommendation of what should be implemented to make the Christian suffering a bit bearable. The thesis also stipulates recommendations for future studies in that particular area.

This study recommended Christians to undertake their sufferings with courage, joy, and prayer as this is used to test their faith and patience in God. Prayer gives Christians the power to overcome all the challenges and sufferings. Christ is always aware of Christians suffering as He also underwent the same suffering and persecution. God's grace and power helps them to overcome all the trials and tribulations in life. Trials are always opportunities for Christians to put their faith into practice. Trials help Christians to endure to receive the blessings that come with faith's miracles and blessings. James in the New Testament confirmed that the reason for responding with joy to suffering was to allow Christians to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The study (Woyesa, Tigist, James Obrempong, and John Dilworth, 2021) also recommended the Church focus more on teaching Christians about suffering so that they should understand the meaning of suffering with perseverance in their Christian walk. The Church should not majorly focus on preaching prosperity but also seek to relieve suffering through preaching the truths about suffering to its followers, encouraging believers to keep repenting their sins so that the Lord may have mercy, and send His Holy Spirit to bring enlightenment, awakening, and revival in the church. Fellowships among Christians will build their faith and develop their growth to endure any suffering that happens to attack them. When the Church and Christians respond positively to suffering, it helps to draw more non-believers to Christ. The call for the Church was to have a genuine spirit of repentance borne in its followers.

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