CHAPTER FIVE

5 THE THEME OF SUFFERING IN THE LIVES OF SOME OF THE BIBLE PERSONALITIES AND COMMUNITIES

"And all flesh shall see the Salvation of God." – Luke 3:6

5.1 Introduction

The Bible narrates the history of salvation from pain and suffering. It commences with the Fall of Man, by his sin of disobedience and reaches its zenith in the redemptive death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. The plan of salvation will attain consummation with the Second Coming of Christ.

The name Bible is derived from the Greek word Biblos which means, "Book". The Bible consists of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are sixty-six books – a collection of ancient Hebrew, Greek and Christian writings. The order of these books in the Old Testament and New Testament is logical and it gives in general a consecutive history of mankind from the creation of the world in the Genesis to the future glory in the Book of Revelation.

The English version of the Bible, which had sprung from the reformation of the sixteenth century, abounds in spiritual treasures. For nearly four hundred years, the Bible has been revered among the English-speaking people of the world for its precision of translation and majesty of style. It has become the main spring of the religion, language and legal foundations of our modern civilization.
G.B Shaw pays a tribute to the scholars commissioned by King James. "The translation was extraordinarily well done, because to the translators what they were translating was not merely a curious collection of ancient books, written by different authors in different stages of culture, but the Word of God, revealed through His chosen and expressly, by inspired scribes. In this connection they carried out their work with boundless reverence and care and achieved a beautifully artistic result." \(^1\)

The Old Testament can be divided into four categories namely history, law, poetry, and prophecy – major prophecy and minor prophecy.

1. History comprises of seventeen books from Genesis to Esther.

2. Poetry consists of five books from book of Job to Song of Solomon.

3. The Major Prophets comprise of five books from Jeremiah to Daniel.

4. The Minor Prophets begin with Hosea and end with Malachi, consisting of twelve books.

The New Testament comprises of twenty-seven books, which can be divided into four categories.


2. Epistles I begin with Paul’s letters to the Romans and ends with Philemon.

3. Epistles II known as the general epistles begin with the Book of Hebrews and end with the Book of Jude.

4. Finally the Apocalypse consists of the visions of St. John known as the Revelation.
The Bible is timeless and universal. It deals with the things that hold a permanent place in human nature. As Newman Watts remarks, "the Bible is in every sense living literature."\textsuperscript{2} It is considered to be a divine library, enlightening man about God's greatest gift, (Jesus Christ) to humanity (Jn. 3:16). It reveals about man's fall and failure. The Bible also unfolds the remedy and the recovery of man from his sin and suffering.

5.2 \textit{The Greatness of the Bible}

The greatness of the Bible is seen in the following facts.

1. It is the inspired Word of the Living God (2 Tim. 3:16).
2. It is precious (Ps. 119: 9, 7, 103).
3. It has healing powers (Ps. 107:20)
4. It is creative (Ps. 33:6) and

The Bible is no ordinary book. Though written by men, it was inspired by the Spirit of God (II Tim. 3:16).

5.3 \textit{Genesis of Mankind and the Genesis of Suffering}

The Book of Genesis narrates sacred history from its commencement of creation and concludes with the account of the Israelites' journey into Egypt. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1). The eternal God brought into existence the universe including things material and spiritual. The creation record is found in Genesis one and two. Man was made in the image of
God (Gen. 1:27) and he was the crown of God's creation. God placed man in an ideal environment (Eden) to glorify God and to enjoy God's fellowship; but with his sin of rebellion and disobedience, suffering and death made their entry into the world. As a consequence of sin (cause) doomed mankind groans under pain and stress (effect). It takes none other than the Son of the Almighty to relieve man from this condition. The Man of Sorrows Jesus came to identify himself with the suffering humanity to become atonement for its sin and bring release and salvation by his death and resurrection. Even in Genesis, a seed of a woman (Jesus) (Ch. 3:15) is promised to bring remedy for mankind wallowing in sin and distress.

A brief study of some of the Bible characters and their affliction will enhance the knowledge and deepen one's understanding of the universal problem of suffering and pain. It will afford helpful insights into their triumphs through faith and tragedies by their disobedient acts.

5.4 **The Curse and the Penalty of Sin and the Fall of Man**

God formed Adam and Eve out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and gave them life with His breath and placed them in the Garden of Eden. They were made perfect and without sin. He gave them authority to rule over his creation (Gen. 1:28) God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest there of, thou shalt die" (Gen. 2:17).

Eve was tempted by the devil and she believed Satan’s lies.

"You shall not surely die.... You shall be as gods knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4 – 5).
Eve did not honour the Word of God. She found the tree pleasant to the eye and yielded to the temptation of the evil one. She ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, and gave it to Adam involving him in the sinful act of disobedience. Immediately they realized their terrible mistake and knew that they were naked. They tried to cover themselves and their guilt with aprons of fig leaves. They hid themselves from the presence of God. God knew that they had tasted the forbidden fruit and disobeyed his command. God pronounced judgement for their rebellion of sin.

"Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."

(Gen. 3:16).

And the Lord said unto Adam,

"... because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife and hast eaten of the tree..., cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; "

(Gen. 3:17).

Adam and Eve had to reap the terrible consequences of their deed. The penalty for their sin brought suffering and death for mankind.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin so, death passed upon all men for that all have sinned."

(Rom. 5:12).

The disobedience of Adam brought a curse upon humanity, but Abraham’s exemplary obedience brought blessings for the nations of the world (Gen. 22:18).

5.5 Abraham – The Father of the Faithful

Abraham was obedient to God’s call. He left his country, kindred and father’s house (Gen. 12:4). Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold
(Gen. 13:2). He was very generous and unselfish. He gave to Lot, the first choice of his land (Gen. 13:9). He was a man of great courage. He defeated the four eastern kings and redeemed Lot and his family from them (Gen. 14:4). He gave tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). He was a great man of prayer. He pleaded with God to deliver a city if there were ten righteous men in it (Gen 18:23 – 33). His chief virtue was his implicit faith in God. Abraham and Sarah were childless, which was a source of great sorrow. With his marriage to Hagar, there was lack of harmony, causing him domestic troubles and pain. But God promised to honour his faith with the gift of a child (Gen. 15:2 – 3). Abraham was hundred years old when Isaac (the child of promise) was born. Every servant of God has to undergo a severe test of faith and obedience. Job lost his children due to the malice of the devil but he blessed the Name of the Lord in total submission and acceptance of the divine will. Similarly Abraham was willing to accept the will of God. He was commanded by God to offer Isaac, the darling of his heart as a burnt offering. God said,

"... take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22:2).

Abraham did not argue with God, or protest against his command. He did not even plead for Isaac’s life. His emotional and mental anguish would have been immense, but Abraham believed in God’s omnipotence. He had learned God's ways are always good and right and disciplined himself to obey his God, knowing that God would provide a way for his son or raise him up from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

Abraham made a journey with his son and servants toward the land of Moriah early in the morning. Leaving the servants at the foot of the mount, he assured them that he and the lad would return after the sacrifice. The emotional
intensity of his pain would have deepened as he stretched his hand for the knife to slay his son; but the moments of pain, sorrow and distress were dispelled by the timely intervention of God. God commended Abraham for his faith (Gen. 22:12). Abraham offered the ram, provided by God as a burnt offering instead of Isaac.

Abraham's willing obedience even won God's favor and blessings. God said to Abraham, "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:18). Abraham's momentary suffering ended with divine deliverance for his son and the assurance of blessings.

5.6 From Prison to Palace – The Story of Joseph

Joseph like his forefather Abraham, believed in the goodness of God. As Oswald Sanders observes, "Joseph was a unique and almost flawless character. The alternating cycles of adversity and prosperity only served to augment the hidden strengths and excellence of his nature." 

The story of Joseph illustrates the tragedy of a broken family relationship. Joseph was the grandson of Isaac. Jacob, Joseph's father loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age and Jacob made him a coat of many colours. Joseph enjoyed advantages of his father's favouritism which brought him long – term misery. The special love and favour of his father provoked the burning jealousy and anger of his ten elder brothers.

5.6.1 Joseph's Dreams

Joseph had a dream in which, he was binding sheaves with his brothers in the field and the sheaves of his brothers bowed to his sheaf. In the second dream
he saw the sun, moon and the eleven stars making obeisance to him. He narrated the dreams to his father and brothers. His father rebuked him and his brothers envied him and hated him more (Gen. 37:8). They were prejudiced against him. Joseph brought honest reports about the unworthy behaviour of his brothers to his father which added fuel to their burning hatred.

On one occasion Joseph's brothers were feeding their father's flock near Shechem. Jacob had commissioned Joseph to check on his brothers and to bring report about their welfare (Gen. 37:14). Joseph found them in Dathan. His brothers had earlier conspired to kill him, and thereby put an end to his dreams (Gen. 37:18). But Rueben the eldest brother protested against their decision and pleaded with them, to save Joseph's life. Joseph was spared from death. But they stripped him of his coat and threw him into the pit. He must have experienced loneliness, fear and felt desolate in the pit. Joseph's emotional and physical stress was quite unexpected and inescapable. Later in the absence of his elder brother, he was sold to the Ishmaelite for twenty pieces of silver. His brothers deceived his father and gave him the impression that Joseph was killed by wild animals. The envy and hatred of the brothers caused both physical and emotional pain to Joseph. The memory of his father's favour and the comforts of his father's house, increased his misery and mental anguish.

Joseph the innocent sufferer was taken as a slave to Potiphar an Egyptian officer's house. The Lord was with him and he was a prosperous man (Gen. 39:2), and his master appointed him as an overseer in his house. Joseph was handsome and intelligent. The wife of Potiphar tried to allure him into immorality but he clung to his moral principles (Gen. 39:9) and he ran away from the scene of temptation. The false accusation of a malicious woman, damaged Joseph's reputation and for years he had to suffer a prison sentence. Joseph did not deserve such a cruel fate. He felt ashamed, hurt and helpless. He had to pay a heavy price
for his purity. He suffered in the prison for thirteen years. He accepted his adversities in a submissive spirit. With the interpretation of the butler's dream, Joseph had hoped to attain freedom but the butler had proved ungrateful. The butler remembered Joseph when Pharaoh's dreams needed an interpretation. Joseph was summoned before Pharaoh and Joseph interpreted the dreams and advised him how he should act in times of plenty and famine. Joseph did not take any credit for his explanation. He ascribed it to God (Gen. 41:16). Pharaoh was impressed with him, knowing that the spirit of God was in him and appointed Joseph as the second ruler of Egypt (Gen. 41:41). Power and honour were ascribed to Joseph. He was not spoilt by the sudden change of fortunes (Gen. 41:14 – 46). He even forgave his cruel brothers and manifested love and fed them in the time of famine (Gen. 45:18). His brothers abused him. He suffered betrayal and imprisonment. He was the victim of gross injustice but God was with him in all his affliction. He discovered the hand of God even in his suffering.

His cruel brothers intended evil against him but God turned it into a blessing and made him a ruler to save their lives. Joseph himself stated,

"... you thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day to save much people alive" (49:20).

Joseph was not embittered by his sufferings. He forgave his brothers and comforted them and nourished them in the land of Egypt. He found God's designs in the pathway of pain.

5.7 The Suffering of the Oppressed

The persecution of the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites is recorded in the Book of Exodus. The book also presents God's deliverance of his people from
the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Israelites sojourned in Egypt during the famine in the land of Canaan. The children of Israel increased abundantly and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty. And the land was filled with them (Ex. 1:7). The growth of the population posed a great problem for the Pharaoh for he feared that they would turn against him and become his enemies and bring about the collapse of his kingdom. He tried to control the population by forced labour (Ex. 1:14) and child slaughter (Ex. 1:16). The midwives refused to kill the male children and saved them. Pharaoh commanded that all male children should be thrown into the river causing bitter sorrow and pain to the Israelites (Ex. 1:22).

Their sufferings disturbed them and united them. God prepared His people for deliverance and prepared a deliverer (Moses) for the task. In their troubles the Israelites cried to God and their cry came up to God by reason of the bondage (Ex. 2:23) God heard the groaning of the people and remembered His promise to Abraham.

5.7.1 The Story of Moses – The Instrument of Deliverance

God chose Moses as the instrument of His deliverance. Moses was concealed during the child slaughter and then spared death by the daughter of Pharaoh who had compassion on him (Ex. 2:6). He became the adopted son of the princess of Egypt, and he was learned in the Egyptian lore (Heb. 1:23). But Moses identified himself with the oppressed Israelites. He killed an Egyptian who ill treated one of the Hebrews and had to flee for his life to the land of Midian; he sought refuge with the Midianites. He married one of the daughters of Jethro a priest and took care of the sheep of his father-in-law.
5.7.2 The Divine Call for Leadership

One day Moses led the flock of sheep to the backside of the desert to Horeb where the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of the bush (Ex. 3:1 – 2). He called unto Moses and said,

“'I have surely seen the affliction of my people, which are in Egypt and have heard their cry by reason of their task masters, for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good land....'“ (Ex. 3:7 – 8),

and gave him the commission to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses was given the revelation of God's purposes (Ex. 3:7 – 10) and assured of his presence and power (Ex. 3:11 – 4:17). Moses was reluctant to take up the grand task of leadership and pleaded that he was not eloquent. He even tried to narrate his disabilities – his lack of prestige (Ex. 3:11), his message (Ex. 3:13), and authority (Ex. 3:11, 13, 4:1). He even mentioned about the ignorance of the people about the nature of God (Ex. 3:13). Moses was given Aaron as his mouthpiece (4:15). God's call to Moses led also to the revelation of God's covenant name Jahweh.

Moses placed his faith in God and went to Egypt and demonstrated God's power over a mighty Pharaoh through ten plagues (Ex. 4 – 11). The sufferings of the Egyptians namely the death of the first born in every Egyptian house, and the loss in his own house broke the heart of Pharaoh. The tragic experience of Pharaoh caused him to release the Israelites from Egypt. While Genesis speaks of man's failure, the Exodus story discloses God's redeeming grace and His deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of slavery and oppression.
5.7.3 The Agony of Leadership

After his wilderness experience for forty years as a shepherd, Moses emerged as a leader and emancipator of Israel from the tyranny of oppression and slavery. Earlier, he forsook the allurements of pomp, power, glory, the pleasures and treasures of Egypt. By faith he chose “to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25). He identified himself with the slaves, and as their leader contended with their cruel masters (Ex. 7:11). He enjoyed a holy intimacy with God and he received instructions for the journey in the wilderness. As a leader Moses had to endure murmuring (Ex. 14:11–12). The Exodus exposes the weakness, the hesitation and the anxiety of Israel. They stumbled in their faith in spite of God’s promises.

The children of Israel were pursued by the Egyptians and their armies who overtook them by the sea beside Pihahiroth (Ex. 14:9). The Israelites were terrified and cried unto the Lord (Ex. 14:10). Their fears paralyzed them and in their frustration and anxiety they accused their leader and hurled sickening questions at him. “Because there were no graves in Egypt hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness...?” (Ex. 14:11).

The test of the impossible faced the Israelites and their leader. Before them lay the Red Sea, and behind them the invincible armies of Pharoah. In their panic and despair they began to lose their faith in God. But Moses the man of God firmly believed in God and His promises. He ordered them not to fear but to stand still and see the salvation of God (Ex. 14:13). Moses was entrusted with power to stretch out his hand in prompt obedience (Ex. 14:16) and the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry land (Ex. 14:22). And the Egyptians pursued after them. The people were defended by the Lord. The cloud covered the Egyptians with darkness but gave light to the Hebrews. The Egyptians realized
that the Lord fought for Israel (Ex. 14:25); the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea when Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea. Thus the Lord saved Israel from its enemy and the people feared the Lord and his servant Moses (Ex. 14:31).

The Israelites murmured against Moses for water (Ex. 15:22) in the wilderness of Sin. Again they grumbled against God, Moses and Aaron (Ex. 16:3). The people preferred food to liberty and even to life itself. They sinned against God and murmured against him and his servant (Ex. 17:1 – 6).

5.7.4 The Personal Suffering of Moses

Despite his selflessness, courage, faithfulness and leadership, Moses was not permitted to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. As per divine orders, he failed to speak to the Rock but smote it with a rod (Num. 20:11).

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eye of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." (Num. 20:12).

Thus Moses had to face sorrow and disappointment due to his exclusion from the Promised Land.

5.8 Community Suffering: The Israelites and the Philistines – David the Deliverer

Israel’s tragic departure from God resulted in its persecution by its enemies. God had permitted punishment and pain to Israel for its apostasy. Israel suffered defeat at Ashtaroth due to its sin of idolatry. Samuel the priest and prophet
admonished them to return unto the Lord with all their hearts and serve God. Samuel’s prayer brought victory over the Philistines (I Sam. 7:2 – 17). Israel was held in abomination by the Philistines. The Philistines and their armies gathered against Israel and king Saul sent his army to meet them but the enemy decided to hold a trial of single combat. Goliath was a giant, ten feet tall, and he was fully armed to the teeth. He defied the armies of Israel and demanded a champion to fight with him. The Israelites heard of his challenge and were “dismayed and greatly afraid” (I Sam. 17:11).

The Philistine repeated his challenge for forty days and there was no one to face him. David had been commissioned by his father to take food for his brothers. When he heard the bold outcry of the Philistine, he resolved to take up the challenge. David faced his enemy armoured with a slingshot. Goliath held him in great disdain and said, “am I a dog that thou comest to me with staves” (I Sam. 17:43). David the inexperienced youth approached his foe with the Name of the Lord. “I come to thee in the Name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (I Sam. 17:45). David acknowledged that the battle was the Lord’s and smote the enemy in his forehead with a pebble. It sank into his forehead and brought him to the ground. David took Goliath’s sword and killed him. David’s victory was essentially a triumph of his faith in God. The unarmed inexperienced youth had become the champion of Israel. The Lord had saved David and his nation from the Philistines, from persecution and reproach.

David’s victory over the giant prompted the jealousy of king Saul and he tried to kill him. David is the most famous ancestor of Christ. He was a great king and poet. He was divinely chosen (1 Sam. 16:13); he was the sweet musician of Israel. He was devout and just. As a king he was regal, gracious and virtuous. He always remembered that it was God who had elevated him to power and position.
David as a king had to face many privations and sorrows. He had learned to tread the path of pain and rejection earlier in his life (I Sam. 26:20). He was rejected by Israel and forced into exile. He had his share of misery and sorrow as a head of a state and head of a family. His favourite son rebelled and turned Israel against him. He was a skillful player on the harp. His poetic genius has made him the royal singer of Israel. His Psalms reflect his agony and distress.

5.8.1 David's Sin of Adultery and the Consequent Suffering and Alienation

At the zenith of his life, David the upright man gave in to feelings of desire. The story of his worst crime which stained his character is found in the Book of Samuel (II Sam. 11:2 – 27). David yielded to a gross temptation in a period of ease. While his army was in the battlefield he was idle and allowed the indiscretion of his soldier's wife to tempt him. He rewarded the faithful service of his captain Uriah with cruel death. By his callous and cold-blooded murder and adultery, David had stained his character. David remained unrepentant. He was miserable due to his guilt and the Lord sent Nathan to convict him of his sin (II Sam. 12:1 – 7). Nathan warned him of the terrible judgement of God. David did not hide or cover up his transgression. He was filled with genuine grief. David knew that he had deserved both temporal death and eternal damnation. David confessed his sin and anguish of heart in Psalm fifty-one and pleaded for God's pardon. He prayed for forgiveness (Ps. 51:3 – 4). Instead of yielding to despair and frustration he made an open acknowledgement of his sin and was restored to God's favour and grace. Psalm fifty-one echoes penitence of the sinner king. As Rowland E. Prothero comments, "it is the revelation of a soul deeply conscious of sin, seeking in broken accents of shame and penitence and hope to renew personal communication with God, heart to heart, thought to thought and face to face. It is
this which gives to the Psalms their eternal truth". David the sinner wept over his sin and was restored to divine fellowship.

5.8 The Weeping Prophet Jeremiah and His Ministry

The weeping prophet Jeremiah spoke of God's judgement and was subjected to physical and emotional torture. Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet, yet he exhibited courage in the face of ridicule and severe persecution. As Alan Pain remarks, "Jeremiah was not a social reformer, but he wanted to reform the social order. He was not a predictor of the future, but he prophesied with confidence of events to come".5

Jeremiah was a priest by birth (Jer. 1:1). He was called by the Lord to the prophetic ministry. Like Moses, he also expressed his inadequacy of his youth, inexperience, deficiency and lack of eloquence (Jer. 1:6). But Jehovah assured him that he was ordained before his birth (Jer. 1:5). He also received the Divine enduement (Jer. 1:9) and commission (Jer. 1:10). He was commanded not to marry (Jer. 16:2). He was truly patriotic but his message was misunderstood. He was regarded as a traitor because he suggested surrender to the Babylonians since their victory was certain. His message was not accepted by his own family (Jer. 12:6). His own townsmen and the people of Jerusalem conspired against him and eventually put him in the stocks (Jer. 20:1 – 3). He was released and again assaulted that he nearly lost his life. He suffered imprisonment several times (Jer. 37:11 – Jer. 38:15). After the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar released him and he assisted the new governor. But the Jews assassinated the governor. Jeremiah was compelled to accompany the refugees to Egypt, where he was stoned to death.
Jeremiah was a man of God. He served God for forty years. He was clear­sighted and candid in his judgement. He was not blind to the sins of his people. He preached against idol worship. His written prophecies were burnt up. He suffered terrible disappointment and loneliness. People cursed him (Jer. 15:10) and threatened to kill him (Jer. 26:8) and even threw him into a dungeon (Jer. 38:6).

5.9.1 Jeremiah’s Physical Suffering

Jeremiah was beaten and put in the stocks at the temple (Jer. 20:1 – 2). No one pleaded for his cause and no one alleviated his physical pain. He was ridiculed and abused and in his frustration and alienation, like Job he cursed the day of his birth (Jer. 20:14). Jeremiah was subjected to further suffering when he was thrown into a cistern of Malkijah (Jer. 38:6). Later he was pulled out of it with ropes (Jer. 38:13). Only the destruction of Jerusalem brought him a temporary relief from suffering.

Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of five Kings. Two of them reigned only for a short period. Josiah brought about a reform in the nation, which was only superficial. The Book of Jeremiah begins with his prophecies of judgements and ends with their fulfillment. The nation of Judah had forsaken the Lord. Jeremiah uttered warnings of impending judgement and besought the people to return to the Lord, and change their ways. He had to deliver God’s message to the corrupt and backsliding age for which he had to face both physical and mental suffering.
5.10 Daniel and the Lion’s Den

The children of Israel broke their covenant with the God of Abraham and turned from God. God sent prophets to warn them of their evil ways; but they refused to repent. Jeremiah fore warned the apostate nation (Jer. 7:25 – 26) but the nation did not hearken to his message. Judgement fell on Israel. Assyrians conquered the ten northern tribes, in 723 B.C. (II Kings 17). Judah the southern kingdom suffered a similar fate later, in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezar humiliated king of Judah (Jehoiakim) and carried off a number of Israelites to Babylon (Dan. 1:1 – 6). Daniel was among the captives.

Daniel seems to have been a descendant of a Jewish family of high rank (Dan. 1:3). He possessed all the high qualifications needed for the Jewish captives to be trained for the services of the king’s court. He decided not to partake the king’s meat and drink, for he felt that it would defile him. He remained loyal to God by his self-control (Dan 1:4). He exhibited moral courage in pointing out to king Belshazar’s fatal mistake of “lifting up himself against the Lord of heaven”. (Dan. 5:23).

Daniel was a man of prayer and he prayed for the mercies of God for the interpretation of the king’s dreams. He, like Joseph, through the interpretation of dreams, was promoted to rulership. In the corrupt court he kept himself as a model of purity. Like Moses, he was both a prophet and a statesman. He had spiritual visions regarding the nations of the world (Dan. 7 – 12).

Daniel gained high recognition during his long period of service at the court, first under the Babylonian kings and then under the Medians and Persians.

As a captive of the Babylonians, he might have suffered loneliness, frustration and despair. His faith in God and his close communion with God,
empowered him to win the battles of his negative emotions. Daniel was a man of prayer. In the reign of Darius, Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king thought of appointing him over the whole realm (Dan. 6:3). The presidents and princess were filled with jealousy for his exalted position and tried to find an occasion against Daniel concerning the matters of the kingdom. But they could not find fault with him. Daniel was a perfect statesman and he was faithful to God and to the king. As Joseph A. Seiss observes, “such a man in such a position administering the affairs with rigid exactness and impartiality, strictly honest himself and tolerating no falsities or dishonesty in others and ever-growing in the esteem of the King and in favour with the people, could not in the nature of things escape the envy and malice of those who suffered by comparison and who found him in the way of their selfish ambition.”

Daniel’s malicious enemies decided to find an occasion against him regarding his worship of God. They prevailed on Darius to issue an irrevocable royal edict prohibiting worship for thirty days and the offering of prayers only to king Darius. Daniel’s moral courage is revealed in his defiance of the royal statute; it did not affect his prayer habits. He entered his house, knelt and prayed three times a day and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10). Being informed about Daniel’s transgression against his law, Darius reluctantly ordered that Daniel should be thrown into the lion’s den. Darius said unto Daniel, “... the God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee”. (Dan. 6:16). The king who loved Daniel had suffered such a mental agony that he spent a sleepless night (Dan. 6:18).

There is no record of the mental suffering of the man of God – But this ‘most beloved’ servant of God who was exposed to physical danger and suffering escaped unhurt; for God had sent his angel to shut the lion’s mouth (Dan. 6:21 –
22). The heathen persecutors, the accusers of Daniel, who intended evil against Daniel were cast into the den of lions and faced their terrible end. Daniel’s faith in God and God's mighty deliverance of his faithful servant changed the heart of the king that he made a decree that in every dominion of his kingdom men should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God... (Dan. 6:26).

Daniel was persecuted for his worship of God. He was saved from the lions by the mighty power of God, and his experience in the lion’s den promoted the worship of the God of Daniel.
The portrayal of suffering and pain in the personalities of the Bible is presented in a Tabular form.

### 5.11 Chart

#### OLD TESTAMENT

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<th>Cause of Suffering</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>Penalty and curse of death.</td>
<td>Expulsion from Paradise, Spiritual death, Alienation from God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>The offering of his son Isaac.</td>
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<td>Joseph</td>
<td>His envious brothers. Injustice of brothers.</td>
<td>Suffered as a slave in Egypt, and in prison for 13 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>The responsibilities of a leader.</td>
<td>Murmuring and angry complaints from the Israelites. Moses' anger.</td>
<td>Moses' entry into Canaan forbidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish community</td>
<td>The mighty Philistine – Goliath the giant.</td>
<td>People filled with fear. David's offer to face the foe.</td>
<td>The Spirit-filled youth overcomes the giant. Israelites saved from the enemy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
<td>As a prophet – his warnings of God’s judgement unheeded and rejected</td>
<td>He was put in stocks Dungeon and well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>The jealousy of the princes and presidents in Darius’ court</td>
<td>He was put in the lion’s den</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
John the Baptist was the greatest man of his generation. He was the forerunner of Jesus. His parents were devout, walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord (Luke 1:6). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy ghost, even from his mother’s womb. He was brought up as a Nazarite and as the angel had revealed to his parents, he prepared the people for the Messiah. “Many of the children, shall he turn to the Lord their God ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16 – 17). He was a man of self-denial.

John wore raiment of camel’s hair and the leathern girdle about his loins and his meat was locusts and wild honey (Math. 3:4); he was a man of moral courage (Math. 3:7), and his plea to the people was to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. When Jesus came to be baptized of him, he expressed his unworthiness; but was obedient to the Lord’s command (Math. 3:16). John was also a man of humility. He called himself the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and acknowledged that he was not worthy to unloose the latchet of Jesus Christ (Math. 3:17). He preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin and all the land of Judea and of Jerusalem were baptized of him (Math. 1:7) Among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist. But he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (Luke 7:27 – 28).

John the Baptist was highly commended by Lord Jesus. John the Baptist had repeatedly warned Herod about his unlawful marriage with Herodias, his brother’s wife. John was imprisoned for the open rebuke of the sincere preacher. Herodias nursed a grudge against him and waited for an opportunity to slaughter him. Herod was a moral weakling for he knew that
John was a just and holy man (Luke 6:20). He had respect for John but his evil passion for Herodias did not allow him to repent of his evil deeds. On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias pleased him with her dance. As a reward for her performance, instructed by her mother, she demanded the head of the holy and righteous John. He did not deserve death for his love of truth and ministry of correction. He is an example of noble sufferer. The shining witness and the forerunner of the Messiah might have suffered mental torture in his lonely cell. It spills a terrible gloom that a wicked and an immoral woman was instrumental for the suffering and death of the greatest of prophets (Mark. 7:28).

5.12 The Suffering of Lord Jesus

The central theme of the Bible message relates to God's plan of redemption through Christ by his suffering and death on the cross. Every book of the Bible relates to him. All the Old Testament truth converges upon him and all the New Testament truths emerge from him. As Selwyn Hughes observes,

"... in Genesis He is the seed of the woman, in Exodus the Passover Lamb, in Leviticus the Pillar of Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night, in Judges He is the great Deliverer, in Ruth He is the Heavenly Kinsman, in Kings the Promised Sovereign, in Nehemiah, the Restorer of His People, in Esther the great Advocate, in Psalms the All in All, in Proverbs the Great Pattern, in Ecclesiastes the Answer to the search for meaning, in the Song of Songs, the Great Lover, in the Prophets the Prince of Peace, in the Gospels the One who seeks and saves, in the
Epistles the great Redeemer and in the Revelation, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." \(^7\)

The prophecies concerning the death of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament were fulfilled and recorded in the New Testament. A perfect picture of the Suffering Servant is portrayed in the Book of Isaiah. The prophetic passages vividly expound the death of Christ,

"He was wounded for our transgression. He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him... And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth, he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he openeth not his mouth" (Is. 53:4 –7).

The Old Testament prophecies focus on the coming of Christ and his suffering on the cross.

The Bible reveals that Christ made himself of no reputation and took the form of a servant ... who was made a little lower than angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:9 – 10).

The gospels record the birth, deeds, ministry, life, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel was written that the reader may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that believing he may have life through his name (Jn. 20:31). The Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jewish Christians. The book reveals that Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and had laid the foundations of the Christian church. While
Mathew presents Christ as the King, Mark portrays him as the Servant of God. Luke depicts him as the Perfect Man, and John portrays Christ as the Son of God.

5.13.1 The Person of Jesus

Jesus was truly human. He was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:21 – 23).
He grew up in Nazareth (Luke 2:51).
He overcame the attacks of the Devil (Matt. 4:2 - 10).
He was without sin (Jn. 8:46).
He died for the remission of the sins. (Rom. 3:25).
And like his miraculous birth he rose from the dead (Mark 16:9).

Christ is the revealer of God. He is the redeemer who took the place of human beings to bear the penalty of sin. He is the last Adam, a life giving Spirit (I Cor. 15:45).

5.13.2 The Mission of Christ

Jesus came to fulfil the law (Matt. 5:17). He came to minister and to give himself a ransom for many. He came to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He came into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17).

5.13.3 The Ministry of Christ

The preaching, healing and compassionate deeds of Jesus Christ were part of the proclamation of the gospel that God had visited his people. God
himself had come in the form of Jesus and it was the period when men actually received the salvation.

5.13.4 Suffering of Jesus

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:26). So it was necessary that Jesus Christ had to lay down his life as a ransom for all (I Tim. 2:6) to deliver mankind from sin and judgement and restore the fellowship (lost in the garden of Eden) between God and man.

Salvation is essential for all men. Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice by taking the suffering and pain of the humanity upon himself. He died that he might redeem them from all iniquity (Tit. 2:14). Jesus was a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3).

Jesus was despised by the Pharisees and the Jews (Luke 22:2).
He endured humiliation (Matt. 27: 28 – 29).
They spat on his face (Matt. 26:67).
He was crucified with the thieves (Luke 22:37).
He was reviled (Luke 23:39).
He was crucified (Luke 23:33).

Jesus Christ suffered terrible mental agony in the garden of Gethsemane that the sweat fell as drops of blood (Luke 22:44). When one of his disciples Judas Iscariot came to betray him he would have experienced emotional stress. In the face of trial and betrayal the Man of Sorrows, had immense grief. He was flogged and forced to carry the cross. He was subjected to horrible death
by crucifixion. It was the most dreadful method of administering the death penalty. It was so brutal and humiliating.

Jesus Christ must have undergone excruciating pain when his hands were pierced with nails. He suffered even from fatigue and thirst. His death was substitutionary and he had to bear the sins of the world, that he felt even abandoned by God. He cried out in anguish of heart. “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). The zenith of all suffering is completed on the cross. Hence the cross offers solace to all nations.

The death of Lord Jesus on the cross is the most horrible and greatest, tragedy of mankind. But Jesus, by his willing sacrifice, turned this deed of cruelty as the means to salvation from suffering, pain and death. By his atoning death he took power over death – “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Jesus died to put away the fear of death from human beings (Heb. 2:15) through the medium of death. Christ destroyed death and Satan who had power of death (Heb. 2:15).

Adam brought sin and death into the world by his disobedience. By his submission, obedience and death on the cross, Lord Jesus had brought salvation from sin and consequent suffering.

As Davison Edmond Soper observes, “Christianity points to a cross, which symbolizes its victory over the world’s suffering and sin. It is the preaching of the cross that breaks the heart of stone. Sin and suffering are every where…. We live not in an ideal world, full of beauty and goodness, but in a disordered world, full of misgiving and malice and sorrow… The life and death of Jesus Christ and His rising again was God’s response to man’s need. Jesus Christ suffered and died; He sounded to the depth, the meaning of human suffering and sin.” 8
Job, who was the precursor of Jesus, was puzzled by the mystery of pain and affliction. Jesus the wounded healer is the answer to any aching heart. The cross symbolises its victory over the suffering of the world and its sin. All those who believe in this truth that Jesus suffered for the sins of humanity can find an answer for their inscrutable pain and sorrow. R.C. Sproul aptly remarks, “it is because of Christ that our suffering is not useless. It is part of the total plan of God who has chosen to redeem the world through the pathway of suffering.”

Jesus Christ is the most innocent and greatest sufferer of humanity in that he bore physical torture, mental anguish, oppression, reproach and rejection from both God and man.

5.14 Suffering of Stephen

Stephen, a follower of Jesus was the first Christian martyr. He was one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles. Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:5). He did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). Some members of the synagogue tried to debate with him, but they were unable to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he answered them (Acts 6:10). His accusers, induced people against him and brought him to the council. He was arrested and put on trial before the Sanhedrin over which the high priest presided. Stephen explained his case in the form of a historical review in which he mentioned about the rebellion of the people against God and their opposition to his messengers – which had culminated in their murder of the Just One (Acts 7:52). He was prevented from finishing his speech. They cast him out of the city and stoned him to death (Acts 7:58).
Stephen's body must have been bruised and bleeding but even in his pain, like Jesus his master, he uttered a prayer for the forgiveness of his murderers (Acts 6:60). His suffering was unmerited. He was an innocent sufferer.

5.15 The Church and its Persecution

The Book of Acts records the experiences of the early church. The disciples of Christ were called 'Christians' first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The early church was devoted to the teaching of the Apostles. The early church had unity with God (Phil. 4:13). Secondly, they were united among themselves. They shared their material possession (Acts 2:44). The Christians were persecuted by the Jews themselves. They were either beheaded, burnt alive or stoned to death.

The Romans persecuted the Christians because they claimed allegiance to their Lord Jesus. The Romans considered the Christians as traitors against their emperor. The kingdom of God was preached among Christians whom the Romans misunderstood and believed that the Christians tried to overthrow their empire. The Roman government persecuted the Christians for their message of equality among men and women.

5.15.1 The Result of Persecution

Due to the persecutions, the Christians were scattered all over the world and became witnesses for their Lord. Thus the suffering of Jesus was the ultimate in all human suffering and it continues to be so. Whatever pain or
torture was inflicted in the past or is inflicted in the present or will be inflicted in the future, can have its culmination in the suffering of God on the cross as a human being. Job foreshadows this, in his acceptance of the divine plan of suffering. The suffering of St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Stephen falls back on the plan of suffering on the cross. This plan of suffering will hold out until Jesus comes again in triumph, not as a humble carpenter of Nazareth but as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
The depiction of the suffering of the Bible personalities in the New Testament is presented in a Tabular form.

### 5.16 Chart

#### NEW TESTAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Cause of Suffering</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>John the Baptist</td>
<td>Protest and warning given to Herod about his adultery with his brother Philip's wife.</td>
<td>Beheaded</td>
<td>Sorrow for his disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lord Jesus</td>
<td>Envy of the religious leaders. As a lamb of God, he had to bear the sins of the world.</td>
<td>Crucified</td>
<td>Salvation of mankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Envy of the elders in the Synagogue.</td>
<td>Stoned to death</td>
<td>Conversion of St. Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Conversion to Christianity</td>
<td>Put to death – subjected to various sufferings.</td>
<td>The Christians were scattered causing the spread of Christianity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**REFERENCE**

*Chapter Five*

6. Oswald Sanders, 160.
7. Selwyn Hughes, Every Day With Jesus (Waverley: Waverley Abbey House, 1997) 19.