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## How Would Persecuted Christians Have Understood Psalms Promising Protection and Rescue?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how persecuted Christians would have understood Psalms promising protection and rescue, whether it's a contradiction for Jesus to say that some will be put to death but also that not a hair of your head will perish, and whether the Bible has been added to throughout the years.

\* How would Christians under persecution (such as those in Rome) have understood verses like Psalm 34:19-20 that promise protection and rescue by God for righteous people?

\* Is it a contradiction for Jesus to say both that some will be put to death and that not a hair of your head will perish (Luke 21:16-19)?

\* Is there evidence that would contradict my coworker's claim that the Bible has been added to throughout the years?

## Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason's hashtag STRask Podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Kogel. Famous Amos. Hey, Greg.

Hey. Well, in our last episode, we talked a little bit about someone who didn't have prayers answered, and I think I mentioned at the end that I had a couple more questions about suffering, so we're just going to continue on with that in this episode. Sure.

And the first one comes from Tim Voigt. There are many verses in Psalms which promise protection and rescue by God for righteous people. How would Christians under persecution, such as those in Rome, understand verses like Psalm 34-19-20? Let me read that verse just so we have a launching pad.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Got that. But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

He keeps all his bones. Not one of them is broken. Now, that last verse, verse 20, is one that's applied to Jesus.

But I actually read the Psalms every night before I go to bed. I read a Psalm or two of its short. It's part of my evening, Vespers of sorts, I guess you could say.

And I have been alerted to a lot of these kinds of verses that taken in a kind of wooden literalism just aren't true. It's clear, you know, he heals all your diseases. It's Psalm 91.

Nothing will come near your tent. You know, and I sometimes will write in pencil next to the Psalm, the passage I'll say, really? It's not my experience. So, here's the way I resolve this.

I have to remind myself the genre of what I'm reading, which is wisdom literature, here's poems, Psalms and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. And Job, these are all considered wisdom literature. That's a category.

And so what we're not going to get out of this genre, especially the wisdom literature, that's poetic, we're not going to get kind of a literality out of it. It's not telling us truths are making promises, characteristically, that are just straightforward. We live from the text.

I think a different thing is going on with a lot of these passages. Now, I'm just going to offer my take on some of these, though I don't have a lot of confidence that I'm right. I'm not sure what to do with these things.

But the righteous cry and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. I think what it's pointing to is a trend that God is a deliverer who listens to those who care about him that are in, for lack of a better word, relationship with him, are living uprightly before him, and therefore God is attentive to their prayers to deliver them as a generalization. That doesn't mean he delivers us out of every difficulty unless one is speaking in a certain sense eschatologically.

In the final measure, we are going to be delivered. The wicked are not so. And we see that kind of characterization often in the Psalms.

Even in Psalm 1, the wicked are not so. Like the stability that the righteous is characterized by the wicked is instability and judgment instead of blessing. And so I think these are meant to be understood as poetic generalizations that God is a very present help in time of trouble.

And the ultimate end of the righteous is going to be glory in a certain sense, just speaking very generally because that's what I think is going on in these passages. They are talking about, it isn't a promise that the righteous will never suffer, but it's a promise of the ultimate end of the righteous and the characterization of in general, even in the

midst of things God is there with us to help us. And sometimes he literally delivers us out of that trouble or he delivers in a different fashion.

I mean, remember Paul had his troubles and talked about in 2 Corinthians, he said, my power, this is God speaking, is perfected in your weakness. So there is a kind of deliverance there for Paul, but it's not a deliverance from the difficulty. It is a promise of fruitfulness that would come out of the difficulty endured.

Okay, so what this puts all of us in is at a very unique and a special place. We are not bereft of a savior, of a rescuer, of a helper or someone that doesn't listen. We are in his hands and whatever happens to us happens in light of the fact or the context of that we are in his care.

And ultimately there will be a final deliverance where none of these difficulties of life will be able to assail us. So that's kind of the way I take these verses, but I'm not dogmatic about that. I'm just not sure.

I'm trying to maintain the integrity of the passage and the revelation, but trying to understand it in a way that's not woodenly literal, because of woodenly literal characterization of the passages just is not true. It's just obvious. And even Jesus mentioned that in this world you will have tribulation.

Which, by the way, I'm sorry to jump in again, but be of good cheer. I've overcome the world. It's that combination of things that I think may be in play here.

Well, you say you weren't sure about your answer, but I think that was a great answer. Greg, those two things, one, it reveals the heart of God that he's a rescuer, a deliverer. He cares about oppression.

He cares about our suffering. And he's a God who heals and delivers, and he's a God of life, not of death, all those things we learn about what he cares about. So that's the first thing you said.

And then the second thing you said was it points toward an eschatological ending, which I was going to remark on, because when Tim asked the question, how would Christians under persecution understand verses like this verse? What came to mind for me were a couple verses by Paul where he talks about being rescued, but he's talking about it eschatologically. So, 2 Timothy 4, 18, he says, the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom to him be the glory forever and ever. So the rescue is bringing him safely to the heavenly kingdom.

It doesn't mean he won't suffer any evil along the way. And then again, in Philippians 1, 18 through 21, he says, I know this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will

even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So his deliverance is being faithful through the suffering so that Christ is exalted, whether he lives or dies.

So he's not equating deliverance with life. He's equating it with the eschatological, the ending where he is glorifying God no matter what happens and he's staying faithful. And so you actually see this very thing at the end of Psalm 34.

If you read on a couple more verses, it ends with this in verse 22. The Lord redeems the soul of his servants and none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. So he talks about the wicked being condemned and then he says, but you will not be condemned and your souls will be redeemed.

So even in this in this Psalm, he's talking about ultimate. He ends with the ultimate. They will be redeemed and your souls will be safe.

That's what you get when you practice never read a Bible verse, right? You're moving and then what follows oftentimes illuminates what came before. All right. So this next question, there might not be anything to add to what we've already said, but it's asking it a little bit differently.

So this one comes from Brooke S. When Jesus speaks of wars and persecution to happen, how can he say some of you will, they will put to death and, but not a hair of your head will perish. Luke 21 16 through 19. Is this a contradiction? Well, it's only a contradiction if the language is not equivocal.

And when I say equivocal, I mean, that means the language can mean a number of different things. Univocal, one voice, the language means one thing and there's no other variation. Given the context, you have a univocal meaning of that word that points to one particular aspect of it.

Equivocal is when you have these words that are similar, but they're or even the same and they are actually referring to two different things. Okay. So they're being used in two different ways.

And if we take that, not one head will perish, one hair, head will perish to take to mean that they will never suffer in this life or they won't die in this life as a result of their conviction, then you do have a contradiction. If what he means there is perishing ultimately, even though there's the suffering, we still will attain to glory, then there's no contradiction. So I think think of 2 Corinthians 4 often because their Paul says momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.

Now, clearly the affliction is in this life and the glory is in the next life. That's where we get our payoff. Paul says in Romans 8 that he does not count the sufferings in this life to be any comparison to the glory that is to be revealed.

Okay. So he's looking again, eschatologically, the end of things, the final disposition of things. We have a temporary circumstance of hardship and difficulty, but the ultimate thing that God brings us to through that and out of that eventually is our resurrection and then the eternal state.

So which is so great that the difficulties we face in this life will seem modest by comparison. Ironically, the same thing is true for the nonbeliever because they will perish and be ushered into a painful judgment that by comparison, the difficulties of their life will seem modest compared to the punishment that they'll receive. Jesus talked about wailing and gnashing of teeth.

He's using these figures of speech to describe the measure of the agony of those who experience God's judgment. So yeah, I think that's the way this is working here, the same concept, just a little different application. One thing we know is if Luke is going to write one sentence after the other, he's probably not contradicting himself.

They're right next to each other. So there has to be some way this has to work together. And I think you're exactly right about how this works.

One thing you'll see a lot in Jesus, but also it turns up pretty heavily in 1 Peter, is the idea that you don't want to be on the good side of man and the bad side of God. So you will suffer at the hands of men, but ultimately you will have glory with God. So I think that's exactly what's happening here.

They will put you to death. You will suffer at their hands, but not a hair of your head will perish. So it's better ultimately to suffer at the hands of men for doing what's right than to be under God's judgment and be against God.

Which is exactly what happened to Jesus, and Jesus is used by Peter as an example for us, just as Christ suffered in the flesh. Arm yourselves for the same purpose. And so I mean, that's right from 1 Peter.

The whole book has so much to do with suffering, but it's meant to encourage and build up. In chapter 5, he talks about the devil probably like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, but resist them. He says, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are happening to your brethren who are in the world.

And after you've suffered for a little while, then God will deliver you. And so we have the same sequence there. This is par for the course.

You're not alone in this. We have an enemy and there's going to be a battle. But one day you stand firm, be strong, and one day there will be a final deliverance from that.

And that seems eschatological as well. We're going to switch gears right now and go to a question from Jacob about the Bible. A coworker of mine says that the Bible has been

added to throughout the years during history.

And I'm wondering if there are any specific pieces of evidence that say otherwise that have been found in history that contradict this statement. Well, okay, right now the question is an example of the tail wagging the dog. Okay.

If a person says that things have been added through history, then it's their responsibility to demonstrate that this is the case. Okay. The person who makes a claim bears the burden.

The person who makes the controversial claim is responsible for given reasons why I think it's so. It is not the Christian's job in this case to assume the burden of disprove as it were. And it seems to me that's the way the question is worded.

Do we have any statements to the contrary that I can point out in history? Well, it's going to be very hard to find, I think, statements which say nothing has been added to the canon, right? Especially since the process of formulating the canon, finalizing the canon, excuse me, took a period of time, a couple hundred years. Now, that doesn't mean that Christians for 200 years didn't know which books were authoritative. It just means that gathering kind of an announcement of the list of those authoritative books, because there were a couple of them, two or three of them that were uncertain.

Their length was the first, second John, third John, they were really small and they didn't seem to have a lot to contribute to the canon and some others. But in any event, so the goal here though, I should say the onus is upon the detractor to say books have been added. So this is where immediately when you read that Amy, I thought of the tactical question, what do you mean by that and how did you come to that conclusion? So what do you mean the books are added? Okay.

He actually just says the Bible has been added too. So I would assume, not just books, but part of it. Okay.

So what are they talking about when you say, do they mean whole books are added? Do they mean that little parts are put into the book? Do they mean certain things are taken out of the books? Or any individual writing or a pistol or something like that? And once you're clear on exactly what they're getting at, how do you know that? Now the way to know if something's been added, and by the way, there have been some things that are added. We know that because there's a way we can assess that. And that is we have early manuscripts that don't have this rendering and we have later manuscripts that do have this rendering.

Now there's only two places I can think of in given the whole issue of textual criticism, which is what we're talking about here, two places where there's anything like a large amount of information that seems to have been added that were not reflected in the

earliest manuscripts. Okay. And those are the woman caught in adultery that we find at the end of chapter six, the beginning of chapter seven in John.

And in different manuscripts, that actually shows up in different places. Conventionally, we've adopted this characterization of John, and so all our Bibles have it in John. But there'll be a marginal reference that says this event was not found in the earliest manuscripts.

That looks like it's been added in. But when something like that has been added in, it's really obvious because we have earlier manuscripts that don't include it, and all of a sudden it shows up later. Okay.

Well, that's an obvious indication of added in, but it's also obvious that it's been added in, and we can marginalize that section in a margin quote or reference to point out. Now, this wasn't in earliest manuscripts, and I'm pretty convinced. I am convinced that the woman caught in adultery is not canonical.

Now, in this particular case, I have other reasons to think it actually happened, but it's not canonical. It's not God breathed. It's a characterization of something that actually took place.

The other large place, I should say, other place where large amounts were added is the extended ending in the Gospel of Mark. And Gospel of Mark kind of ends abruptly. It doesn't give a lot of detail other than he is risen kind of thing, and then it ends, and more things are added.

And it looks like the earliest manuscripts don't include that. The voice seems to have changed just a little bit in the long ending of Mark. But again, that's another thing that all biblical readers, certainly all biblical scholars, and many biblical readers are aware of because they can see it in the margin of their Bibles if there is margin references.

That's the only two places where we have reason to believe something has been added in that's the substitute. There are other particular things, smaller pieces, even words that show up in later manuscripts that aren't in the earlier manuscripts. One, interestingly enough, is Jesus comments on the cross where he says, Father forgive them, who they know not what they do.

That's a textual variant, and the earlier manuscripts don't have that. It's also theologically troublesome, seems to me. But that's another issue.

I'm just making the point that we can find where things have been added. So strictly speaking, the complaint has a legitimacy to it. Things have been added to the Bible.

Okay, yeah, actually we know that. And that's why, because we know that, since we have a tool called textual criticism that allows us to separate the wheat from the chaff,

we are able to reproduce the original rendering, because we know these are things that were added later. And the real issue is whether we can reproduce the original rendering, and that we can do to a 99.5% certainty, and the things that are maybe uncertain, have no theological consequence at all.

I don't think people understand how the Bible is transmitted, or how textual criticism works, or anything like that, because it's very easy for him to prove what he's saying. All he needs to do is go look, go to Ireland, look at Paul's letters from 200 AD. What are they doing in Ireland? What are they doing there? They have a whole set of his letters.

Oh, I didn't know that. Okay. From 200 AD.

I know British Museum or the British Library, they have a lot of stuff. And also, you know, we have at least right here in Huntington Library, I think they have a whole bunch of the photographs of all that material. But you're saying go back to the early.

Yeah, just go back. Take a look. See if there's anything different from those letters then to now.

And that's all you have to do, so you can just ask them, well, what did you have in mind that's not in the earlier manuscripts and just point that out to me. I think people just have this vague idea that over time things were added, we have no idea what's been added, but we have so many manuscripts that are so old that that's just, it's not plausible. But again, people just don't understand.

So I think if you can just explain how this works, I think that will help. Sure, but the first two questions are really important to push the burden back on them. If they say it's been added to, what do you mean it's been added to? Tell me specifically what that looked like.

Okay. And a lot of times I'll come up with it. How I'm so nice here, blah, blah, blah.

Well, the Council of Nicaea had nothing at all to do with the canon of scripture. Okay. It was completely unrelated, although this is a myth that a lot of people hang on to because it circulates around the Internet.

And so, and I think I was going to make a second point, but now it out is caseing. I think we already said the important thing. Okay.

All right. Well, thank you for your question. Jacob and Brooke and Tim, we really appreciate hearing from you.

If you have a question for us, you can send it on Twitter with the hashtag STRSQ or you can go to our website at [str.org](http://str.org) and just look for our hashtag STRSQ page. And you'll find a link there where you can send us your question. We look forward to hearing from you.



This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.