

experiencing the fiery afflictions of Pharaoh's persecution. This means not only that He is "afflicted" in Israel's "affliction" (Isa. 63:9). It also means that it is Christ's presence in the Old Testament church which preserves it so that, though "the bush burned with fire," it "was not consumed" (Ex. 3:2).

After the elders of Israel were told of God's longsuffering towards and with them (in Christ), they were struck with awe: "when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (4:31).

Moving from the Israelites who were forced to make bricks without straw, James 5 refers to Christian employees who are abused in the work place and defrauded of their wages (4, 6). What is the exhortation God gives to His people in this Scripture? Join a labour union? Go on strike? Overthrow the "capitalist pigs"?

No, exercise the grace of longsuffering in light of the bodily return of Jesus Christ! "Be patient [i.e., be longsuffering] therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience [i.e., is longsuffering] for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient [i.e., be longsuffering]; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh ... Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience [i.e., longsuffering]" (7-8, 10).

Notice the two examples given here of patience and longsuffering: first, a farmer waiting for the harvest (7) and, second, the Old Testament prophets who endured suffering for the truth they preached (10). The saint from Uz is then set forth by James for our emulation: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (11).

Hebrews 6 exhorts us to show Christian "diligence" to the "end" (11), "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience [i.e., longsuffering] inherit the promises" (12), like Abraham (13-14), who was tested severely and, "after he had patiently endured [i.e., been longsuffering], he obtained the promise" (15).

We must not grow discouraged or bitter with our sovereign God because of our afflictions. We must not huff and throw in the towel. We must not protest, "But I have already suffered long enough!"

The teaching of James 5 and Hebrews 6 is that Christians will and must suffer, but that we must, by God's grace, be longsuffering in our suffering! Why? Jesus Christ our Saviour is coming again to punish the wicked and deliver us! This hope in the fulfilment of God's promise of perfect salvation and joy is our spiritual motivation to be patient and longsuffering in our afflictions and hardships.

*Rev. Stewart*

### **Covenant Protestant Reformed Church**

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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **God's Longsuffering and Our Suffering**

Our covenant God is longsuffering towards His people in their suffering. David confessed this comforting truth in Psalm 86. After telling the Lord about his persecution by the ungodly—"O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them" (14)—David consoles himself with these words: "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, *longsuffering*, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (15).

Similarly, Jeremiah prays, "O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy *longsuffering*: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke" (15:15). That is, "Do not, in thy longsuffering over me, permit my enemies to persecute me so long that they succeed in destroying me!"

In Christ's parable in Luke 18:1-8, the widow is the object of great injustice and ill-treatment at the hands of her oppressor. Even the unjust judge, wanting to get rid of her, eventually vindicates her (4-5). Jesus draws this lesson from the parable: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with [i.e., is longsuffering towards] them?" (7).

How is this longsuffering possible for the unchangeable and ever-blessed God? The answer is that God shows empathy and is longsuffering towards His people, especially in their sufferings, *through Jesus Christ* who is both God and man in one divine Person. As God, Jesus cannot suffer. As man, our Saviour is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15).

Our calling is obvious: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (16). Like the widow in the parable (as well as David and Jeremiah), we "ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1), even when we are oppressed and afflicted by the ungodly, for God suffers long and empathizes with us in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 63 teaches the same truth, though without using the word "longsuffering": "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (9). This refers to the "love" and "pity" of the impassible God who was "afflicted" in "all" Israel's "affliction" in "the angel of his presence," Christ, who is God's special divine angel (i.e., messenger) who "redeemed" and "saved" them. Again, as a man, our Saviour is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15).

Isaiah 63:9 declares the same message as Exodus 3:2. Where is Christ, "*the* angel [or special messenger] of the LORD"? In the burning bush, in the midst of the church

*(continued on p. 4)*

## Does Solomonic Authorship Befit the Song of Songs?

A reader writes, “I was reading the Song of Solomon and I wondered why the Spirit of God chose a man like Solomon, who flagrantly abused the marriage covenant, to write the book most interpret as exemplifying the one-flesh union between a man and his wife, and between Christ and His bride. Perhaps it is just another way of showing how the type always fails, unlike the antitype! I would be very interested in reading a good Reformed book on the Song of Solomon bringing out all it teaches of God’s covenant. I don’t know if there has been one.”

Sadly, many, even within the Reformed camp, have denied that the Song of Solomon, sometimes known as the Song of Songs or Canticles, is an Old Testament metaphorical song celebrating the marriage relation between Christ and His church. One author, a former classmate in college, called it “An Erotic Love Song.” A former professor in a Reformed seminary denied that it was canonical; that is, he denied that it had a place in Scripture because it could not have been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, the questioner is right. It does exemplify the truth of marriage that husband and wife, as earthly pictures of Christ and His church, presuppose an underlying earthly figure. That underlying figure is the institution of marriage that dates from Paradise. And the underlying type is Solomon himself. David was a type of Christ as the warrior that destroys the enemies of the church to prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven. Solomon, in all the wealth and beauty of his kingdom, was a type of Christ who brings about, through His cross, the everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

Solomon married 700 wives and also possessed 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). It was indeed a mockery of the institution of marriage. Solomon paid the price for this, for his foreign wives led him into idolatry.

I have no interest in justifying Solomon’s sin. But it must be remembered, nonetheless, that before the coming of Christ, who, by His death and resurrection, made possible the true heavenly marriage, the earthly picture in the old dispensation was only a picture and thus defective. And so God permitted polygamy and concubinage because the earthly picture was not very clear in its depiction of the reality. It was like a very bad photo of a royal figure taken with a cheap camera. The picture was fuzzy and blurred; the details could not be clearly seen. When God reminded David of the many things He had given him, one of those was his many wives (II Sam. 12:1-14). But those in Scripture who were married to more than one wife inevitably had family problems: Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, David, Solomon and many of the kings in both Israel and Judah.

It ought also to be remembered that, although the historical books of the Old Testament do not mention Solomon’s confession of his sin, it is almost certain that Solomon’s book Ecclesiastes is his confession.

Finally, Solomon, though it was sinful, was carrying on a custom which monarchs in his day practised. Harems, sometimes huge, were common in palaces throughout the Middle East. Many wealthy men had harems.

Now to the question itself. The question seems to me to assume that no wicked man could be used by God in inspiring the Scriptures. But all the men whom God used in writing the Bible were sinners. Nevertheless, when they wrote, they were “holy men of God” (II Pet. 1:21). Their holiness was not a total and complete alteration of their entire nature from depravity to sinlessness. David, after all, committed his sins of adultery and murder after writing Psalm 23. It does mean that, in writing the Scriptures, they were kept by God from any possible error. And it means that all who participated in the writing of Scripture were God-fearing men, consecrated to the Lord and His cause. This was true of all of them, including Solomon.

David was a dreadful sinner, as well as his son Solomon. David sinned against the seventh commandment, as well as Solomon, and added the sin of murder to hide his adultery. Before his conversion, Paul committed the dreadful sin of persecuting Christ’s church.

I realize that the questioner meant a little more than the fact that God used sinful men to write the Scriptures: he meant to say that one who broke the marriage bond was used by God to write about that marriage bond. How can one who defiled marriage write about true marriage, especially the marriage of Christ and His church?

It seems to me that we ought to reframe the question in this way: Is not Solomon, the forgiven sinner, in the best possible position to be used by God to write a song on the beauty and wonder of the marriage between Christ and His church? He knew better than most how wicked he was (and we are), and how even saints corrupt an institution that is so sacred and holy. And so he looked at the true marriage of Christ and His bride the church, and saw in it the redemption of the marriage state among God’s people. That is, he saw what a marriage here on earth ought to be when it reflected the reality of the true marriage. So he sang a song about it by the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ. He did so as an expression of hope for the future, when the figure would disappear to make room for the reality.

One more point on the truth of inspiration. God, in His marvellous wisdom, did not pick men at random to write the Bible. From eternity, He conceived in His own mind the one sacred Scripture in which God in Christ is fully revealed. The Bible is a portrait of Christ. From eternity, God also chose those men whom He wanted to write the various parts of Scripture. As if that were not enough, God sovereignly determined all the preparation that each man needed to be able to write what He had determined for him to write. If one does not include in the doctrine of inspiration both predestination and divine providence, he is bound to go wrong. So Solomon, weak and sinful as any man, was chosen to write parts of Scripture (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon). Throughout his life and forty-year reign, God was preparing him for this work. Solomon seems to me the ideal man to write this beautiful song about marriage—here on earth but especially in heaven. It was a longing for the reality, and who can better write about the reality than one who knew how he had corrupted the figure?

*Prof. Hanko*