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CONSIDER HIM: DO NOT BE ANGRY WITH GOD

Scott Souza

“Consider Him who has endured such hostility”

(Heb. 12:3).

The encouraging witness in our trials (Heb. 12:1).

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

As a lead in to its consideration of Christ’s sufferings, Hebrews 12 begins by drawing a conclusion from chapter 11, which gives many examples of people who have triumphed by faith and have not given themselves over to anger against God. The subject of our anger with God for our suffering is not brought up until 12:5, but it is a force to be reckoned with throughout the whole chapter. Some obtained triumph and deliverance by faith. Others endured various forms of defeat in a manner pleasing to God. All “gained approval through their faith” (Heb. 11:39). On the basis of these facts, the writer of Hebrews draws the conclusion that we should heed their witness and, like them, “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

The witnesses, says the writer, surround us (12:1), or spread around us like spectators in the Olympic Games. They are there not just to watch us but also to bear testimony to how they triumphed by faith and to encourage us to do the same.

As Adam Clarke says in his commentary:

Here is another allusion to the Olympic games: the *ago-*

nistae, or contenders were often greatly animated by the consideration that the eyes of the principal men of their country were fixed upon them; and by this they were induced to make the most extraordinary exertions.¹

The idea is that there are so many who have triumphed through faith that it is impossible to count them. So triumph by faith, though difficult, is not something that only a select few can accomplish.



The witnesses are called a "cloud of witnesses." The Greek word used here is the type of cloud which does not have definite borders, so it is impossible to tell where it ends. The idea is that there are so many who have triumphed through faith that it is impossible to count them. So triumph by faith, though difficult, is not something that only a select few can accomplish. Many (in fact an uncountable number) do it. "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands" (Rev. 7:9).

In the Greek original of Hebrews 12:1, the witnesses are called "martyrs." The basic meaning of the word is "witness," or someone who gives his testimony to another. In other words,

They are spectators who interpret to us the meaning of our struggle, and who bear testimony to the certainty of our success if we strive lawfully (2 Tim. 2:5). [The word martyr] explains what the true nature of this host is, widely different from the pitiless throng visible to the bodily eye at the heathen games.²

The witnesses are keenly concerned for our sake, not for their own, though the memory of their own conflict may deepen the intensity of their interest and suspense. The main thought is that we should be encouraged and stimulated by their example.³

He prefers to call them witnesses rather than runners to show that they are not competitors to snatch the prize from us, but rather supporters to cheer and applaud our victory, just as Christ is not only the umpire but stretches forth His hands to us and supplies us with strength and energy, and in short prepares us and trains us to start the race and leads us by His strength to the goal.⁴

With such encouragement in mind we are told to lay aside every "encumbrance" and sin and to run with patience the race that is set before us. To "lay aside" means to put off like a robe, and "encumbrance," especially in this verse, means a burdensome load. (In other cases it is used for being overweight or for being arrogant.) The basic idea seems to be anything which causes an emotional weight or burden on our heart—the cares of this world. These may include the desire for an untroubled life, the quest for money, the burden of loneliness, the numbing pain mentioned above, etc.

"Sin" refers to the indwelling sin, "the lust which so possesses all of us that we feel that we are held by its snares on every side."⁵

We are told that this sin "easily entangles us," which literally means that it "skillfully besets us." It comes from three Greek words combined into one: "well," plus

“about,” plus “to stand,” and means “the sin that stands well, or is favorably situated, ever surrounding the person, and soliciting his acquiescence [agreement].”⁶

We could think of the sin in various ways. Some compare it to the stone wall of the amphitheater that encloses the person in the arena and keeps him from escaping. Others compare it to the long robes worn in that day which clung to a person and hindered his movements, especially in an athletic contest. But regardless of the image we have in our minds, it is

The well circumstanced sin; that which has everything in its favor, time and place, and opportunity; the heart and the object; and a sin in which all these things frequently occur, and consequently the transgression is frequently committed.⁷

What we term the easily besetting sin is the sin of our constitution, the sin of our trade, that in which our worldly honor, secular profit, and sensual gratification are most frequently felt and consulted. Some understand it of original sin, as that by which we are enveloped in body, soul, and spirit. Whatever it may be, the word gives us to understand that it is what meets us at every turn; that it is always presenting itself to us; that as a pair of compasses describe a circle by the revolution of one leg, while the other is at rest in the center, so this, springing from that point of corruption within called the carnal mind, surrounds us in every place; we are bounded by it, and often hemmed in on every side; it is a circular, well-fortified wall, over which we must leap, or through which we must break. The man who is addicted to a particular species of sin (for every sinner has his way) is represented as a prisoner in this strong fortress.⁸

We are told to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” The Greek word for “endurance” means to stand firm under great pressure and is often used to show us that we must continue in the faith until the end in spite

of great pressure to quit. As Clarke puts it, “the prize is inefably great; and, if we lose it, it is not a simple loss, for the whole soul perishes.”⁹

This is an exhortation, both to those who *have* true faith—the kind which endures—and to those who only *seem* to have true faith. This second type of person falls away and does not endure the trials of the Christian life. The writer of Hebrews told his readers that he was confident that they were the type of people who continue in the faith, even though he talked to them as if they might not be: “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way” (Heb. 6:9).

Such exhortations help encourage those who have true faith to exercise it and to use it for its intended purpose—namely, to give us the ability to endure the trials that come upon us and remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of them.

THE LORD, THE CHIEF WITNESS

As further encouragement we are told, in verse 2, to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Above the “cloud of witnesses,” who encompass us, is our King, no Roman Emperor dispensing by his arbitrary will life or death to the stricken combatant, but One who has Himself sustained the struggle which we bear. . . . To Him our eyes are to be turned while we look away from every rival attraction. From Him we learn Faith.¹⁰

He is called “the author and perfecter of our faith”—or the One who not only begins our faith but also brings it to a successful conclusion.

Author, generally signifies captain or leader, or the first

inventor of a thing; . . . But the reference seems to be here to the . . . judge in the games, whose business it was to admit the contenders, and to give the prize to the conqueror. Jesus is here represented as this officer; every Christian is a contender in this race of life, and for eternal life. The heavenly course is begun under Jesus; and under Him it is completed. He is the finisher, by awarding the prize to them that are faithful unto death. Thus He is the author or the judge under whom, and by whose permission and direction, according to the rules of the heavenly race, they are permitted to enter the lists, and commence the race; and He is the finisher, . . . the perfecter, by awarding and giving the prize which consummates the combatants at the end of the race.¹¹

Since Jesus is the one who both begins and finishes our faith, we should understand that this is the supernatural, transforming faith given from God, "perfect in realization and in effect."¹² It is not man-centered and does not originate from man, and man by himself cannot bring it to a successful conclusion.

THE CROSS

The second verse also tells us that Jesus endured "for the joy that was set before Him." This was the joy of doing the Father's will. Psalm 40:8 tells us that Christ delights to do God's will, and Jesus said the same about Himself and demonstrated it in many different ways during His earthly ministry, especially when He had to lay down His life to do God's will (John 14:34; 5:30; 6:38; Matt. 26:39; Luke 22:42).

This [promise of joy] did so cheer and strengthen Him, that with unexpressible patience He cheerfully endured the cross, with all the concomitants of it, the sorrows in His soul, the torturing pains in His body, of buffetings, smittings, piercings

of thorns, tearing His flesh with scourges, boring of His hands and feet with nails, with all the evils that either the malice or rage of devils or men could inflict on Him; He was neither weary of His burden, nor shrinking from nor fainting under it. With what invincible meekness and passive fortitude did He undergo all that was foretold of Him! (Isa. 53).¹³

THE SHAME

He not only endured the cross, but also despised the shame or considered it a light thing.

. . . Slighting and casting out of His thoughts all the disgrace poured on Him by His enemies, both in His mind and His action contemning all the blasphemies, taunts, reproaches, and shameful carriages of sinners to him, suffering without any emotion all their indignities, even in the midst of the most shameful death itself (Phil. 2:6-8), though he was the most innocent as well as the most excellent person in all the world.¹⁴

Through His endurance Christ "has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Paul tells us that "if we indeed suffer with Him we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). And James also encourages us to endure by citing the example of Job; "You have heard of the endurance of Job, and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful" (James 5:11).

We are therefore told to "consider" Jesus (Heb. 12:3). The word "consider" means to make a careful estimate or analysis. As Westcott puts it, "The writer seems to say 'Consider Christ, reckoning up His sufferings point by point, going over them again and again, not the sufferings on the Cross only, but all that led up to it.'"¹⁵ In other words,

Attentively observe and analyze every part of His conduct,

enter into His spirit, examine His motives and object, and remember that, as He acted, ye are called to act; He will furnish you with the same Spirit, and will support you with the same strength.¹⁶

... [F]or if the Son of God who ought to be adored by everyone willingly submitted Himself to such hard struggles, who of us would dare to refuse to undergo the same with Him?¹⁷

THE STRIFE

Our sufferings are insignificant in comparison to Christ's, so we are exhorted not to become weary:

Here is a continued allusion to the contenders in the Grecian games, who, when exhausted in bodily strength and courage, yielded the palm to their opponents, and were said . . . to be weary or exhausted; . . . to be dissolved, disheartened, or to have lost all bravery and courage.¹⁸

So the writer wants us to recognize that weariness comes both by our own necessary efforts and by the assaults of our opponents. Both forms of weariness must be endured and overcome.



The word "striving" has particular reference to boxing, and the previous images had to do mainly with running.

So the writer wants us to recognize that weariness comes both by our own necessary efforts and by the assaults of our opponents. Both forms of weariness must be endured and overcome.

One way or the other our struggle will end at death—either natural death or death from the struggle itself. But while life goes on, if we do not look to Jesus both for His example and for His help we will grow weary. "The final failure comes from continuous weakening. The moral strength is enfeebled little by little."¹⁹

The persecutions we undergo for the Gospel . . . are remedies to destroy sin. Therefore whether He is healing our vices or whether He is preventing us before we sin, He is exercising us in the struggle against sin which the apostle mentions. Indeed the Son of God pays us this honor that He does not reckon the things we suffer for His Gospel as the penalties of sin.²⁰

We must bear in mind that those whom he is addressing here have gladly suffered the loss of their goods and have endured many reproaches. Yet he accuses them of laziness because they have grown tired halfway through the contest and have not gone on energetically right to the death. There is no reason for us to seek our discharge from the Lord, whatever service we have performed, because Christ does not have any discharged soldiers except those who have conquered death itself.²¹

CONSIDER HIM AGAIN

"Consider Him . . . so that you may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3).

It is wise at this point, since we have just been exhorted to carefully consider Jesus, to go into the gospels and take a close look at what He suffered and how He handled His trials.

1. EARLY LIFE

Isaiah's prediction that Jesus would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3) was fulfilled, in part in the following ways:

He was born into an impoverished branch of David's royal line (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38 with Luke 2:24; cf. Lev. 12:1-8, esp. verse 8).

He and His family lived all their lives with a bad reputation—his mother and stepfather being accused of fornication, and He being accused of being illegitimate. This reputation haunted Him all His life.

Within two years of His birth an attempt was made on His life, the first of several. Because of this He and His family had to live in exile in Egypt during Herod's last year of life (Matt. 2:13-16 with context; Luke 2:39-40 with context).

Although He was ready to assume His duties for God and begin His life's work by the age of twelve, He was unable to do so for perhaps twenty years, in part because His parents did not understand Him or His mission (Luke 2:41-52).

2. MINISTRY

Temptation. When he finally began His ministry it was with a severe forty-day fast followed by a severe temptation by Satan in person (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

Interference. At several points during His ministry He found it necessary to resist attempts by His mother and/or brothers to exert undue control over His ministry (John 2:1-12; Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; Mark 3:21 ["own people" is "kinsmen" in the margin]; John 7:1-9). In addition, His brothers seemed to be somewhat hostile to Him and apparently did not believe in Him until after His resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19).

Others among the common people, such as those from His own town, Nazareth, did not believe in Him; He was,

in fact, rejected at least twice in Nazareth. He was also poorly received in the wider area (Luke 4:16-32; Matt. 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Matt. 11:20-24; John 6:41-44, 59).

Death Threats and Plots. The incident in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-32—A.D. 28) also involved an attempt (by the common people) on His life—the second—Herod's attempt thirty-two years earlier being the first. The next year (October, A.D. 29) a third attempt was made by the Jewish leaders in the temple (John 8:59). The leaders made a fourth attempt about two or three months later (December, A.D. 29); this was also in the temple (John 10:22-39). The fifth attempt was by the leaders and came in about four months (April 7, A.D. 30) and resulted in His crucifixion (Matt. 26:47; 27:35, 50 and parallels in Mark 14:43; 15:24-25, 37; Luke 22:47; 23:33, 46; and John 18:3; 19:17-18, 30).

Besides the actual attempts on His life there were plots to kill Him. The Pharisees and Herodians initiated a plot when He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-15; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). The scribes and the Pharisees plotted against Him when He rebuked them for having vain religion (Luke 11:53-54). The Jews persecuted Him for healing an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:16). The Jews also wanted to kill Him for calling Himself the bread of life (John 7:1). They wanted to kill Him for claiming to come from God (John 7:19-20, 28-30, 32). They wanted to kill Him for bearing witness to what He had seen with His Father (John 8:37-40). Herod wanted to kill Him, probably to prevent Him from becoming king (Luke 13:31). The chief priests and Pharisees wanted to kill Him for raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-54). The chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people wanted to kill Him after the second cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45-48; Mark 11:15-18; Matt 21:12-17). The scribes, Pharisees, Herodians, and chief priests wanted to kill Him because of His parables

predicting that God would destroy them (Matt. 21:45-46; 22:15; Mark 12:12-13; Luke 20:18-20).

Verbal Conflict. There was also open verbal conflict, usually a challenge to His authority (John 2:13-25 is typical).

Unbelief. These plots and verbal battles were inspired by hearts that refused to believe (Matt. 12:38-42 with its parallel in Luke 11:16, 29-32; Matt. 15:12-14; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-13; Luke 7:30-35).

Misunderstanding. Even His faithful disciples understood Him poorly (Matt. 8:24-27 with Mark 4:37-41; Matt. 11:1-15 with Luke 7:18-29; Luke 8:23-25; John 11:1-45).

Hypocrites. From the earliest days of His ministry until its conclusion, many of His followers were self-deceived hypocrites who thought of themselves as His disciples. But their hearts were not with Him, as shown by Jesus' testimony about them and by the fact that various groups of them forsook Him from time to time (Matt. 19:22; John 2:23-25; 6:26, 60-66; 8:31, 59).

Abandonment by God. Even God the Father forsook Him when it was time for Him to bear the penalty for our sin (Matt. 15:46; Mark 15:34). It was the anticipation of this abandonment by God and becoming the sin bearer that caused Him such agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30-46; Mark 14:26-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1).

3. HIS LAST GREAT TRIAL

His Intense Love. Let's look more closely at His last moments. During the Last Supper He told His disciples, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). In the original Greek the word translated "desire" and "desired" is such an intense desire that in most places in Scripture it is translated "lust." His feelings for His disciples were so deep that they elicited the most intense desires possible.

Sorrow in Gethsemane. In Gethsemane He "began to be

grieved" (Matt. 26:37). He and His disciples had sung a hymn just before leaving the Upper Room where they had the Last Supper. It may be that they had followed the normal custom and sung the words of Psalm 115—118. If so, it is quite possible that as His sorrows came upon Him He had the words of Psalm 118:27 on His mind: "Bind the festal sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar." Whatever the case,

We gather that the true test of power only comes in the moment itself: then the weakness of the flesh betrays itself, which before was hidden, and the inner emotions pour out. . . . Ambrose was right, I think, when he said, "He did not assume the appearance of incarnation, but a reality. He had to bear grief in order to conquer sadness, and not shut it out: they do not have the praise of fortitude who are drugged by wounds, and not hurt."²²

Resolution. His willingness to bear grief was shown even by the fact that He went to a place (Gethsemane) where He knew He could be found by Judas and the others who were seeking His life. This was His custom (Luke 22:39), and He did not change it to avoid what He had to do.

Isolation. He separated Himself somewhat from the disciples, because, as Plummer notes, even His closest friends could not enter adequately into the violent turmoil of His emotions.²³ According to Luke, He knelt down and prayed; and according to Matthew, He fell on His face to pray. Perhaps He knelt, placing His face on the ground, rather than holding it up. The form of the Greek verb indicates that He continued praying.

Exceeding Sorrow. Matthew 26:37 also says He was "distressed."

It expresses, as stated well by Swete, "the distress which fol-

lows a great shock," "the confused, restless, half-distracted state" (Lightfoot) "which may be worse than the sharp pain of a fully realized sorrow" (S. D. F. Salmond).²⁴

In Matthew 26:38 Jesus says, "My soul is deeply grieved." Salmond calls this "the pain of a great shock."²⁵

Matthew says He was affected by grief and sorrow (or trouble of mind). Luke says that He was seized with anguish, and Mark added that He was dismayed. Where did that grief and trouble and fright come from, if He did not see in death something more sad and more fearful than the separation of soul and body? . . . [D]eath in itself would not have so agonized the Spirit of God's Son unless He realized that He had to deal with the judgment of God.²⁶

Jesus said His sorrow was "to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38). Salmond describes it as "a sorrow that kills, a sorrow that strains life to the point of extinction."²⁷

"Even He has been finding that the most perfect human nature may feel weakness when confronted with the supreme requirements of the will of God."²⁸

*Only fear and reverence for God will cause one to pray in such a manner and mean it even though it causes terrible suffering:
"Thus the apostle rightly says that he was heard for His fear."*



His Will vs. God's Will. In spite of this weakness He prayed, "Yet not as I will" (Matt. 26:39). "This is faith's due limit, to allow God to decide differently from what we desire."²⁹ Only fear and reverence for God will cause one to pray in such a manner and mean it even though it causes terrible suffering: "Thus the apostle rightly says that he was heard for His fear."³⁰

In Matthew 26:40 we are told that He came to His disciples and found them sleeping. In fact, He did so three times. "It would have been no small relief to His sorrow to have had the disciples as companions and partners: on the other hand, it was a bitter addition to His distress to be abandoned by them also."³¹

His Desire to Escape. He prayed that God would remove the cup (the alienation from God that was about to come upon Him) if God was willing (that is, if it could fit into God's plan). But instead He asked that God's will be done rather than His. This resistance of His intense desire to escape this horror reveals His love even more deeply since He let His love for the Father control Him, rather than His love for Himself.

Agony of Mind. Luke mentions that He was in "agony" (22:44). In the Greek this word is used for "great distress of mind"³² and for "an agony of fear."³³ This was produced by the anguish of being cut off from His Father. He typified, and was, the sin offering for our sin. In scriptural terms, the sin offering was greatly affected by being sacrificed. It changed its nature from being something innocent, to becoming a sin bearer. In fact, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "sin" and "sin offering" is the same word. In a sense the sin offering did not simply bear sin, it became sin. It is used in many Old Testament passages, including Leviticus 10:17 which speaks of the sin offering bearing the iniquity of the whole congregation. According to Scripture, this is precisely what happened to Christ: "He

made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21; see also Isa. 53:10; Eph. 5:1). The psychological and spiritual devastation of such an event must have been unthinkably awful.

Physical Agony. For this reason, an angel was sent to strengthen Him, probably both in body and in spirit. In light of the fact that Christ was in heaven before coming to earth in the incarnation, He would have known this angel personally. So He had at least one familiar companion to stand with Him. The messenger came just at the point of His deepest anguish. He began to sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Some think this only looked like blood, but probably it not only looked like blood, but also had blood mingled in it. Probably this was sweat and grime mingled with blood that collected in large clumps and dripped off Him as He prayed. Such a condition is known in medical literature as hematidrosis ("bloody sweat"). Various examples have been documented, including a bloody sweat, described by Plummer, that broke out on the body of Charles IX of France as he was on his deathbed.³⁴

In this condition the capillaries burst and send blood into the sweat glands. Heat builds up in the body, producing sweat, and grime mixed with blood comes out and collects on the skin. It is amazing that the physical trauma of the unbearable emotion that caused this sweat did not kill Him. Perhaps it would have if it had not been for the help of the angel. Jesus was able after this assistance to continue praying until He had gained control over His emotions. But as soon as He had gained inward composure, Judas came to carry out his treachery and deliver Him to the authorities to be crucified.

Under the Power of Others. He was tried as a criminal five separate times in the space of about seven hours by Annas, by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (which was the

council of the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes), by Pilate, by Herod, and by Pilate again. Even though no one could find a valid charge against Him they accused Him of blasphemy and sedition and crucified Him.

During the first trial an officer of the high priest struck Jesus with his hand (John 18:22). During the second trial (by Caiaphas) they rejected His testimony that He was the Christ, condemned Him to death, and spit on Him, reviled Him, mocked Him, and beat Him with a blindfold over His face, demanding that He tell them who hit Him. During the third trial His accusers told Pilate that Jesus was perverting the nation, forbidding tribute to be given to Caesar, and claiming to be a king, and many other accusations. Christ answered none of the accusations except that He confessed to being a king, but not of this world, and Pilate found no fault in Him. Pilate then sent Him to Herod for His fourth trial. More accusations were heaped upon Him, none of which He answered. Herod and his soldiers found no fault in Him but mocked Him and sent Him back to Pilate. During the fifth trial, Pilate realized that the chief priests were accusing Christ out of envy and attempted to release Christ to the crowd, in accord with the custom at Passover. But at the instigation of the chief priests and elders the crowd asked instead for Barabbas, an insurrectionist and murderer. The crowd insisted five times on the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Scourging. Pilate then scourged Him and delivered Him to the soldiers to be crucified. Edersheim notes that the scourge was often loaded with lead, spikes, and bones, and lacerated the back, chest, and face of the victim. He says that Cicero called it the "intermediate death."³⁵ "The victim generally fainted, often died."³⁶ The *Davis Dictionary of the Bible* notes that pieces of brass were also used sometimes in the scourge and says that "the Christian martyrs at Smyrna about A.D. 155 were so torn with the scourges that their

veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles and sinews, and even the bowels, were exposed (Eusebius, *Hist.* iv. 15).³⁷

Crucifixion. Pilate seems to have had some hope that this scourging would satisfy the crowd, and they would accept His release—but to no avail. Before crucifying Him the soldiers put a crown of thorns on His head, mocked Him, spit on Him, hit Him on the head, and struck Him with their hands. They then made Him drag His cross through the streets, and nailed Him to it. While hanging there smothering to death He had to endure further insults from the crowd. His life ended when He dismissed His spirit from His body as His heart burst.

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe” (Heb. 12:28).

Author

Scott Souza is a freelance writer and teacher who lives in St. Albans, West Virginia. He has given much time to in-depth biblical research. He has previously contributed to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Notes

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36. *The One Volume New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), n.p.; comment on Matthew 27:26, "Scourged Jesus."
37. John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Fourth Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 689.