

Sample paper 5

English 320

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### An Inspection of Biblical Reference in the Captivity Narrative

Puritan piety, as seen through their writings, is an example of a life lived solely to glorify their God. In captivity narratives especially, their writing shows an array of profound religious emotions. Puritans taken into captivity by groups of savages write of their deepest despair and repentance of their assumed sins that are being punished, almost at the same time as praising their lord for his preservation of their lives. The juxtaposition of these two rationalizations of God's destructive and preserving will calls into question the evidence for the Puritan ability to harbor these two doctrines into their beliefs while in captivity. To begin to understand what governs this thought process, it is necessary to consider the Puritan interpretation of the Bible in the circumstances for which they reference it. Perhaps the most logical of starting points is to pick apart biblical references in Puritan captivity narratives used to magnify, rationalize or contextualize their plight.

The translation of the bible that the Puritans used was a product of the Protestant persecution in England after the rule of King Henry VIII, so it is easy to see why they preferred it over the King James Version. The King James Version was a later response to the Geneva translation by a king who "disapproved of the Geneva Bible because of its Calvinistic learnings", and is notorious for its flowery language (DeMar). The Geneva translation is named as such because it was written by a number of exiled Protestants living in Geneva during the reign of Queen Mary, (Bloody Mary), in England in the sixteenth century, predating the Puritan

migration to America (DeMar). Being a text created during a time of religious persecution, it became an emblem of sorts for Protestant oppression (DeMar). Religious trends changed with consequent monarchies, but the Geneva translation had a stronghold in England. The Puritans found this translation appealing due to it being “outspokenly anti-Roman Catholic” (DeMar). The battle between the two translations eventually ended when “the Geneva Bible was replaced by the King James Version, but not before it helped to settle America” (DeMar). It is possible that the Puritans felt an unusually strong connection to their Bible due to its similar roots in religious persecution. Biblical references in Puritan captivity narratives would then take on even more significance because of the turbulent history of both the book and the people.

Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative, A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, is the account of her capture and subsequent time of living amongst the natives as their captive. Rowlandson defines her captivity as a divine trial, and compares herself to biblical figures saying such things as “I hope I can say, as David did, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted*” (Rowlandson 468). Being a Puritan, Rowlandson’s only sense of comfort came from the rationalization of her situation with her religion, and her belief in the idea that all happenings were the result of God’s machinations. Throughout her narrative, Rowlandson uses Biblical verses to bolster her story, and most of the verses are so short that a lot of room is left to speculate as to their biblical context, and to whether or not the reference is entirely appropriate to the situation. For example, when recounting the initial attack of the natives upon her town, she makes a reference to the book of Job when stating that only one person was able to escape from the original thirty-seven people that were in her home hiding. She says of the only, Ephraim Roper, who escaped that “none escaped either present death, or a bitter captivity, save only one, who might say as he, Job 1.15, *And I only am escaped alone to tell the news*” (Rowlandson 445).

