## Suffering for Christ

### А. Suffering for Christ and the Believer’s Union with Him

Suffering for Christ is a certain consequence of following the Lord. Jesus, in fact, alerted His disciples to this inevitability: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you.… If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15:18-20). Mark records the following challenge from our Lord: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mk 8:34). Jesus invited His disciples to “drink the cup that I drink,” and “be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” (Mk 10:38).

Paul also teaches this principle: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). He also claimed that we are “fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}” (Rom 8:17). In a similar fashion, the apostle John, while in exile on Patmos, considered himself a “fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance {which are} in Jesus” (Rev 1:9).

We note, especially in John 15:18-20, that our suffering for Jesus is directly related to our union with Him. We suffer because we are in Him and, therefore, are participants in His life. Union with Christ involves participation both in His glory and in His sufferings. As Berkhof writes, “His sufferings are, in a measure, reproduced and completed in the lives of his followers.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Campbell concurs, “Since Christ suffered, believers will inevitably follow him in his sufferings.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:17: “…fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}.”

We will examine Paul’s teaching in Colossians 1:24 in more detail. He writes, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.” Here, we must not understand Paul’s statement to “fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions” as referring to Paul’s sufferings having redemptive significance.[[3]](#footnote-3) Christ accomplished our redemption alone. Paul is working off the principle of union with Christ and claiming that the Church receives a certain “quota” of suffering, which it is appointed to endure. In his sufferings, Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions” in the sense of filling up a certain measure of this “quota” of suffering.

We find a confirmation of this thesis in Revelation 6:10-11, where the martyrs ask, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” The Divine answer: “Until {the number of} their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” It appears that a certain amount of suffering is assigned to the Church, which is fulfilled both by the martyrs and by other believers as well.

It is interesting to compare Jesus’ sufferings with those of Stephen, with whom we can draw a parallel. Both were tried before the Sanhedrin and were accused of blasphemy. Both were slandered by false witnesses. Both Jesus and Stephen were driven from the city. Both spoke of the “Son of Man”: Stephen saw Him in a vision, while Jesus claimed to be Him. Both prayed that God would receive their spirits. Both Stephen and Jesus forgave their enemies. It is very unlikely that these parallels happened by chance. They were recorded to show that believers, after the model of Stephen, are sharers in Jesus’ sufferings.

We can draw a parallel between Christ’s sufferings and those of Paul as well. Both came to Jerusalem and encountered opposition there. Both were tried before the Gentiles after having been arrested by unbelieving Jews. Both expressed the desire to do God’s will through suffering. The Roman authorities sought to release them both. These similarities may also be subtle indicators that believers share in Jesus’ sufferings.

We must make another clarification. When we speak of suffering for Jesus, we mean those trials that are directly connected with our life of Christian discipleship and service. The following passages make that clear:

- But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Pet 4:13-14).

- For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ… For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came {to us} in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life (2 Cor 1:5-8).

Therefore, it is improper to speak of the general tribulations that all people experience as suffering for Jesus. Lenski agrees, “It is a mistake to call all our suffering a cross.… The cross is that suffering alone which results from our faithful connection with Christ.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The Lutheran theologian Mueller also concurs, “It is only the Christian who is said to bear a cross, and this indeed as he exercises his Christian calling in the world.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

On the other hand, Tannehill notes an exception to this rule. In Romans 8:17-23, it seems that Paul connects suffering for Christ with the general suffering in the world.[[6]](#footnote-6)

### B. Conflict between God’s Kingdom and the World

Few who are acquainted with Scripture would challenge the claim that it paints a picture of this present age as one of conflict between two great (although unequal) spiritual powers, God and Satan. Their respective kingdoms are repeatedly contrasted with one another in Scripture, reflecting their mutual antagonism and incompatibility (see Col 1:13, Eph 6:12-13; Matt 12:25-28).

This spiritual conflict involves people as well, who either belong to “the kingdom of God,” or the “domain of darkness” (Col 1:13). John writes, “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19). Jesus came into the world as light into darkness, polarizing humankind into those who “receive Him” and those who “do not receive Him” (Jn 1:4-11). The latter belong to the κόσμος (*cosmos*), the anti-god system that dominates fallen people, who lie in the power of Satan, the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4).

Scripture clearly confirms the spiritual dichotomy that Augustine later indicated by the terms “The City of God” and “The City of This World.” We will now trace the historical development and manifestation of this phenomenon, giving special application to the question of martyrdom.

In this section, we will pursue two goals: (1) to demonstrate that humanity is and always was polarized between the City of God and the City of the World; (2) to show that in this great drama, the people of God usually play the role of the oppressed and persecuted. This drama will unfold as we survey the history of persecution and martyrdom in biblical times and Church history. We will discover that at different times certain groups especially typify and represent the City of God and the City of the World.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**1. Cain and Abel**

Those who have reflected on biblical history and the history of humanity often trace the contrast between good and evil persons back to the account of Cain and Abel (including Abel’s “replacement,” Seth). Beginning with these individuals, humanity is commonly divided into the “wicked” and the “righteous,” of whom these brothers serve as prototypes.

In the Genesis account, there are suggestions that moral character was associated with physical lineage. We note that in the seventh generation from Adam, Lamech (from Cain) kills a man, whereas Enoch (from Seth) walks with God. Although Genesis 6:1-4 is a difficult passage, a number of scholars understand the “sons of God” to represent the godly descendants of Seth, while the “daughters of men” are from the wicked line of Cain.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Cain versus Abel/Seth contrast, however, is usually applied allegorically to represent the “wicked” and the “righteous” in general, and is witnessed by the New Testament. First of all, we note that in Hebrews 11 Abel is presented as an example of faith, while Jude describes sinners of his day as having “gone the way of Cain” (Jude 11). In Matthew 23:35 (par. Luke 11:51), Abel is listed first among the righteous sufferers of Old Testament fame.[[9]](#footnote-9) More notable is John’s usage of Cain as the prototype of those who persecute believers (1 John 3:12-14).

Dodd describes this key passage as follows: “The two primeval brothers become representatives of the evil world over against the family of God. As Cain hated Abel to the point of killing him, because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous, so the pagan world hates Christians, and for the same reason; because of the inherent opposition of wickedness to goodness.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Grayston concurs: Cain “represents the world which kills, or threatens to kill, Christians.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Delitzsch writes, “Cain is the representative of the class of men which is ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ (1 John iii. 12), and Abel is the representative of the Church, which is hated by the world and persecuted even unto blood.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

This Cain-Abel/Seth typology was common during the intertestamental period. In 4 Maccabees 18.11, as in Matthew 23:35, Abel is listed first among righteous sufferers. Jubilees 4.2-5 applies Cain’s curse to him who “smites his neighbor treacherously.” The Testament of Benjamin declares, “Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished with a similar judgment.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Philo offers by far the most developed Cain-Abel/Seth typology. In his *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain*, Cain represents those who commit “everything to the mind,” while Abel represents those “attributing to God all the consequent work of creation as his own” (v. 2). Every detail of the story of Cain and Abel, from their occupations to the order their names, have significance for Philo in respect to the contrast of good and evil. In his *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, he writes that men “who love virtue and piety.. may be classed under Seth as the author of their race” (v. 42), while Cain’s race shows “a life of plotting, and cunning, and wickedness, and dissoluteness” (v. 43). Philo devotes an entire work to the theme, *That the Worse Are Wont to Attack the Better*, claiming that self-lovers like Cain “never cease struggling against them (God-lovers like Abel) with every kind of weapon, till they compel them to succumb, or else utterly destroy them” (v. 32, parenthetical insertion mine).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Among the church fathers, Cyprian claims that Abel “initiated martyrdom.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Later in Church history, the Anabaptists also recognized the contrast between the two sons of Adam, attributing to Cain the “first attack of the Serpent,” and to Abel the “first advance in the direction of Christ.”[[16]](#footnote-16) In more modern times, Delitzsch comments, “A chasm is now established within humanity itself between two kinds of seed, one man placing himself on the side of the seed of the woman, the other upon that of the seed of the serpent.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

We recognize, too, that the conflict between Cain and Abel went beyond human factors and motives. It was not simply the record of ancient tensions between “pastoral and agricultural ways of life,”[[18]](#footnote-18) or even the result of Cain’s jealousy toward Abel. As Hamilton notes, “Cain was not acting totally independently”; his action “was an external manifestation of the grip that Satan had on his life.”[[19]](#footnote-19) In like manner, higher forces motivate the conflict between the “moral descendants” of these two brothers to this day.

**2. Israel and the Descendants of Ham**

We encounter the next Old Testament representations of the conflict between the kingdoms of God and Satan among the sons of Noah. Immediately after the Flood obliterated the dichotomy between the descendants of Seth and Cain, a new rivalry appears – the descendants of Ham versus the descendants of Shem. From Ham descended three great enemies of pre- and early-monarchical Israel: Mizraim (Egypt), son of Ham; Canaan, son of Ham; and the Philistines, descendants of Mizraim. We will give particular attention to the first two of these.

The conflict between Israel and Egypt,[[20]](#footnote-20) as described in the first part of the book of Exodus, is well documented. In light of our proposed paradigm, it is not difficult to assign the role “The City of This World” to Egypt, the oppressor of God’s people. The “Evil City” is even more clearly represented by Pharaoh, especially in his dramatic confrontation with Moses and Aaron, representatives of “God’s City.” The narrator of Exodus also reveals that this conflict was not merely between mortals, but had a “cosmic” dimension as well. The last plague God sent on Egypt was directed not only toward Pharaoh and his subjects, but against the “gods of Egypt” as well (see Exod 12:12).

Earlier in the canon, in Genesis 12 Canaan is cursed to be the servant of his uncles as a result of his father Ham’s sin. Thus, the “cursed” race of Cain is replaced by the “cursed” race of Canaan.[[21]](#footnote-21) Later on in the narrative, the descendants of Shem are traced to the patriarchs of Israel, while the descendants of Canaan include “the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite” (Gen 10:16-17), Israel’s enemies during the years of conquest (Josh 3:10). The repeated warnings in the Pentateuch against associating with the Canaanites accentuate the moral and spiritual distinction between the two groups. Matthews provides this helpful observation:

Israel understood the contrast between the godly seed of Seth and that of Cain, whose descendants founded an expanding urban civilization marked by godlessness. Israel saw itself as the godly seed in the earth, chosen by the Lord, but it too faced the “Cains” and “Canaans” of its times who had built up its towers and cities opposing the Hebrews seeking refuge in the land.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This distinction, not only with the Canaanites but also with all pagan nations, was evident in the rite of circumcision. In the Old Testament we frequently see that non-Israelites are generalized under the derogatory rubric “the uncircumcised” in connection not only with their physical condition, but also with their moral degradation.

The conflict between the descendants of Shem and Ham is consistent with our unfolding biblical picture of the division between the “City of God” and the “City of This World,” and further depicts the greater conflict raging between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and the persecution of the former by the latter.

**3. Israel and Its Prophets**

During the time when Israel was less threatened by her Canaanite neighbors, another dichotomy between true servants of God and servants of Satan came to the forefront – the conflict between Israel and her prophets.[[23]](#footnote-23) The people of Israel, in rebellion against God, become persecutors of the prophets. Thus the people who had been distinguished from the surrounding nations by the rite of circumcision are themselves considered “uncircumcised” (Jer 9:25-26), thus indicating their change of allegiance from the City of God to the City of This World. This tension between people and prophet, of course, dates back to the beginning of Israel’s history when the people contended with Moses. Yet, it was during the time of the monarchy, when prophetic activity was at its height, that this antagonism reached the point of active persecution of the prophets.

We must acknowledge that the distinction is not technically between the people of Israel and their prophets, but rather between the general population and the righteous remnant, which the prophets publicly represented.[[24]](#footnote-24) Consequently, we can find references to righteous suffering outside of the writings or experience of prophets. Bromiley notes, “The Psalms, too, are full of pleas to God made by those who suffer persecution because of their faithfulness to God and His commandments (e.g., Ps 119:84–87, 150, 157, 161).”[[25]](#footnote-25)

We could also mention Ps 44:22, which is applied in Rom 8:36 to persecution,[[26]](#footnote-26) and Ps 69:7-9, where the psalmist also suffers “for Your sake.” The Psalms contain many references to the wicked seeking to slay the righteous (Ps 10:2; 37:12, 32; 64:5; 94:21). Some references refer to persecution of God’s people in general:

For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, and those who hate You have exalted themselves. They make shrewd plans against Your people, and conspire together against Your treasured ones. They have said, “Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more” (Ps 83:2-4).

We also consider that David, the author of many psalms, suffered persecution at the hands of Saul and provides a sterling example of the persecuted believer.

In addition, not only is righteousness found outside of the prophets, but iniquity is also found among them. Bright notes the division between true and false prophets in Israel.[[27]](#footnote-27) The account of Micah in 1 Kings 22 demonstrates this contrast between true and false prophets. Yet, since the dichotomy is most frequently depicted in Scripture by the simple “prophet versus people” or “prophet versus king,” we will employ this scenario to illustrate our point.

We must also acknowledge that during the monarchical period, Israel was not always in a backslidden state and that prophets arose only periodically, “in times of national crises, whether in the form of national apostasy or in the form of imminent war.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Thus, the picture of a constant, ongoing struggle between people and prophet is somewhat artificial. Yet the conflict between them was frequent enough that Stephen could make the sweeping accusation that the Jews “are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:51-52). Similarly, Jesus rebukes Jerusalem, which “kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her” (Matt 23:37). Thus, we are justified in including the “Israel versus prophet” scenario in our unfolding persecution paradigm.

The Old Testament abounds with examples of Israel rejecting its prophets. Before the fall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, Scripture records how God’s people refused to heed the prophets’ voice.

Northern Kingdom: Yet Yahweh warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets {and} every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments”…. However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in Yahweh their God (2 Kin 17:13-14).

Southern Kingdom: Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent {word} to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they {continually} mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets (2 Chr 36:15-16).

The personal experience of some prophets, who suffered at the hands of evil kings, confirms this testimony: Hanani (2 Chr 16:7-10), Amos (Amos 7:10-13), and especially Jeremiah (Jer 11:19-20; 20:1-2; 32:1-5).

In connection with the persecution of the prophets, a difficult question arises, “How many of the prophets were actually killed for their message?” The New Testament seems to indicate that many, if not all, eventually experienced martyrdom.[[29]](#footnote-29) Baumeister comments, “In Jesus’ day the idea was in circulation that not just this prophet or that but all prophets had died a violent death as a result of what they had done.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Generally, commentators object that this is an exaggeration based on accounts of prophetic suffering in Jewish midrash,[[31]](#footnote-31) which was supposedly popularized in the Early Church to show that the Jews had killed not only the prophets but the Messiah as well.[[32]](#footnote-32) Pobee claims, “Clearly at this point the prophet-martyr motif has moved from the realm of sober history to that of theology.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

We do note that in the Old Testament, only two instances of a prophet being killed are recorded. The first is found in Jer 26:20-23 where Uriah the prophet is slain with the sword by King Jehoiakim. This incident is mentioned in passing during Jeremiah’s trial after his arrest for preaching against Jerusalem.[[34]](#footnote-34) Like Jeremiah, he had preached judgment against Judah; but, unlike Jeremiah, he had perished as a result.[[35]](#footnote-35) The second is in 2 Chr 24:19-25, where Zechariah the priest is stoned by order of King Joash after rebuking the king’s apostasy.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Other passages record prophetic deaths. We read, for example, how Jezebel killed the Lord’s prophets (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19:10, 14; 2 Kgs 9:7). Montgomery calls this “the first, although indirect, reference to a systematic persecution of the sons of the prophets.”[[37]](#footnote-37) It also implies an “organized prophetic resistance” to Baal worship.[[38]](#footnote-38) In addition, two other key Old Testament passages strongly imply a more widespread killing of prophets in Israel. First, in Nehemiah 9 the people’s prayer of confession acknowledges that Israel “killed Your prophets who had admonished them” (Neh 9:26).[[39]](#footnote-39)

One has to admit, with Clines, that “the factual basis for this generalization is slender as far as our evidence goes,” but we need not conclude with him that “it may be rhetorical heightening of Israel's rejection of the prophetic word.”[[40]](#footnote-40) The New Testament confirms the acknowledgment in Nehemiah 9:26 that Israel consistently resisted prophetic ministry and persecuted the prophets (see verses listed earlier). It appears, then, that sufficient persecution took place to warrant this generalization.

The second key passage is found in Jeremiah 2:30. Here again, a hostile attitude towards God’s prophets, resulting in their execution, is described.[[41]](#footnote-41) We read:

In vain I have struck your sons;

They accepted no chastening.

Your sword has devoured your prophets

Like a destroying lion.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Various emendations to Jeremiah 2:30 have been suggested. Jerome and Duhm, following the Septuagint, feel the “sword” is God’s punishment of false prophets – if they were true prophets, we would read “My prophets” instead of “your prophets.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Yet, McKane responds, “We should suppose that the second person plural suffix emphasizes Israel’s responsibility for the treatment meted out to these prophets.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Hoffmann suggests another emendation, “In vain have I smitten *my children* (בניכם toבני ) that have received no correction. *My sword* hath devoured *you* (נביאיכם to בכם) like a destroying lion,” noting that lions are usually punishment from God in Jeremiah (Jer 4:7, 5:6, 49:19, 50:17), as is the sword (Jer 12:12, 14:13, 15, 18, 25:16, 29, 47:6), and that the verb שחת (“destroy”) is often used for punishment of the people (Jer 5:10, 13:7, 9, 14, 14:10, 18:4, 36:29).[[45]](#footnote-45) One would prefer to see, however, some textual confirmation for an emendation of such significance.

We must also consider whether non-canonical sources have any historical value for indicating prophetic martyrdoms. The *Lives of the Prophets*, a Palestinian Jewish work (with “Christian expansions”) of the 1st century A.D., describes the violent death of several Old Testament figures.[[46]](#footnote-46) According to the *Lives*, Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh,[[47]](#footnote-47) Micah the Morashtite was thrown from a cliff by Joram, Amos was beaten to death by the son of Amaziah, Jeremiah was stoned by Jews in Egypt,[[48]](#footnote-48) and Ezekiel was killed by the Jewish leadership in exile.[[49]](#footnote-49)

In addition to these more substantial claims, an eleventh century midrash by Hadarshan lists Shemiah and Ahijah the Shilonite as prophetic martyrs. Shemiah was apparently slain by King Baasha of Israel, and Ahijah by King Abijah of Judah. However, historical discrepancies in these accounts and weak support in the rabbinic literature make Hadarshan’s claims suspect.[[50]](#footnote-50) A Jewish legend of even more questionable historical value depicts Hur as a martyr, having died for opposing the Golden Calf.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Heb 11:37 provides some substantiation for these non-canonical accounts: “They were stoned, they were sawn in two,… they were put to death with the sword.” Schoeps feels that these plural verbs are poetic and not to be taken literally. He simply sees here references to the deaths of Zechariah and Jeremiah (stoned), Isaiah (sawn in two), and Uriah (slain with the sword).[[52]](#footnote-52) This assumption appears reasonable. At the same time, this means that Hebrews confirms the execution of Isaiah and Jeremiah as historical and makes more plausible the assumption that not all prophetic deaths are recorded in the canon.

Admittedly, we do not find many *concrete* cases of the killing of a prophet in the canonical Scriptures. Yet, the additional and more general references to prophetic deaths, both canonical and non-canonical, listed above are substantial. In addition, I would consider the New Testament references to the frequent killing of prophets in Old Testament Israel to be reliable and not simply an uncritical acceptance of unhistorical Jewish midrash. I would share with Origen (*Com. on Matt.,* 10.18) the conviction that New Testament authors accepted as historical some of the non-canonical accounts of prophetic deaths, such as those mentioned in the *Lives of the Prophets*. Their inspired endorsement of this tradition validates, in general, its historicity. Thus, we can embrace the “Israel versus prophet” theme not only as a legitimate continuation of our persecution paradigm, but also as a significant intensification of it, more closely approximating classical martyrdom.

**4. Israel and the Gentile Empires**

The period of the monarchy ends with both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel going into exile, introducing the next stage of Israel’s history – its domination by Gentile Empires. As noted by Fischel, the depiction of the prophet as martyr continued to develop in this period, only under different conditions: “The course of events also preserved and soon gave prominence to the idea of the prophet-martyr who suffers under a *foreign* tyrant.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Now, the contrast is not so much righteous Israel against backslidden Israel, but rather a united Israel against pagan oppressors.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This period of persecution actually preceded Israel’s return to Palestine. When the Jews were under Persian rule, Haman attempted to annihilate God’s people because of his hate for Mordecai (see the book of Esther). When the Jews returned to the Promised Land, their enemies tried to hinder the temple’s reconstruction (Esther 4-5) and the restoration of Jerusalem’s walls (Neh 4-6).

Even before the dawning of this epoch, God had been preparing His people to face this new challenge. The Book of Daniel not only predicts the coming Seleucid persecution, but also provides prototypes of righteous suffering – Daniel and his three companions.[[55]](#footnote-55) Many have noted the pedagogical value of the Book of Daniel in preparing God’s people for suffering.[[56]](#footnote-56) Chapters 3 and 6 lay the foundation in describing how God is able to deliver his people from persecution. In chapters 11 and 12, however, God’s people are massacred: “Daniel and his friends had been delivered by unusual divine interventions and death, but the warning here is that this will not always be the case.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

Since God’s ability to deliver has already been established, it is implied that a greater purpose is being worked out in allowing these later saints to perish. This is confirmed by the frequent references to “time” in the latter chapters of Daniel: “The period of time in which the temple is defiled and the righteous are oppressed is predetermined, established according to the divine timetable. The individual righteous person is at the mercy of the larger historical designs of God.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

The eventual deliverance of the martyrs is promised, however, through the resurrection of chapter 12.[[59]](#footnote-59) Collins summarizes, “There is an evident parallel here with the stories in Daniel 3 and 6, but there is also a profound difference. The apocalyptic vision no longer entertains the hope for miraculous deliverance in this life. The hope for salvation is beyond death.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Kellerman sees a literary transition occurring in the book of Daniel from the typical “salvation history” of the Old Testament, where salvation equals deliverance (Daniel 3 and 6), to the “martyr history” of intertestamental times, where salvation equals resurrection (Daniel 11 and 12).[[61]](#footnote-61)

Another important feature of the Book of Daniel is how earthly persecutions reflect the greater heavenly conflict. One can note, for example, the many references to angels and evil “princes” in the book of Daniel. The same is noted in intertestamental writings as well. Wintermute summarizes the thinking of Jubilees: “The hostility between Israel and the surrounding nations may be seen as a conflict between good and evil.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

The predictions of Daniel 11 and 12 find partial fulfillment in the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C., as recorded in the Maccabean literature. In *2 Maccabees* 4-14, we read of numerous killings of Jews who would not compromise their faith, with special attention on the martyrdom of Eleazar (6:18-31) and the seven brothers (7:1-42).[[63]](#footnote-63) These same martyrdoms receive further elaboration in *4 Maccabees*.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Besides the actual cases of persecution in the intertestamental period mentioned above, we may note how an intertestamental writer, the author of the *Book of Enoch*, in symbolic (and supposedly prophetic) form depicts the age-old conflict that we have been describing in this chapter. In *1 Enoch* 85-90, the struggle between the true people of God and their enemies is pictured sequentially as: (1) a black and red bull (Cain and Abel); (2) twelve white sheep among wolves (Israel in Egypt); (3) sheep and other animals (Israel in Canaan during the time of the judges); (4) sheep against sheep (backslidden Israel against the prophets); and (5) shepherds against the sheep (heathen empires oppressing Israel). This all leads to an eventual apocalyptic judgment where the sheep are finally rescued.

The history of Israel and her predecessors gives us grounds to conclude that the dichotomy between the City of God and the City of This World clearly extends back to the first human family. Although at times this dichotomy was represented by parties within Israel itself, to a large degree the nation of Israel was the representative of God’s kingdom.

**5. The New Testament Church and the Jews**

The coming of Christ causes an even more radical polarization of the Cities of God and of this World. He comes as “light into the darkness,” and even brings division between members of one family (Matt 10:34-36).

The Gospels record how Jesus was ever conscious of His inevitable clash with evil. Even at the height of His ministry’s popularity, He began to prepare His disciples for the suffering He was about to endure (Mark 8:31). Jesus experienced rejection from all sides. His neighbors and acquaintances in Nazareth sought to kill Him (Matt 13:53-57). The inhabitants of Gadarenes, where He delivered a man from demons, asked Him to depart from their region (Matt 8:34). Even before His sufferings, His disciples abandoned Him (Matt 26:56). To our amazement, His most ardent opponents were the religious leaders of His day.

Even though the suffering of Christ was preordained by God for our redemption, we should not confuse the ultimate cause of Christ’s suffering, the plan of God, with its effective means – the opposition of Satan and the world. The positive and redemptive results of Christ’s death in no way minimize the intensity of the spiritual conflict that brought it about (Luke 22:53). Thus the crucifixion of Christ presents us with yet another, and likely the most extreme example of the world’s opposition to and rejection of God. In Stauffer’s words, “The death of the Messiah is the climax of the persecution of all the saints.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

Jesus did more than oppose the kingdom of this world; He called others to join His side. Those who responded, though, would be subject to the same rejection that He Himself endured. This rejection, as we will soon see, will initially come from the Jews, the previous representatives of the City of God.

The Synoptics provide us with numerous examples of the fate of Jesus’ disciples.[[66]](#footnote-66) We may begin with the so-called “Little Apocalypse” of Mark 13, the atypical character of which has prompted much discussion among exegetes.[[67]](#footnote-67) Here, among various end time predictions, Jesus forecasts future tribulation and persecution for his followers (Mark 13:9-13, par. Matt 24:9-14 and Luke 21:12-19). These very same warnings of rejection are also found in Matthew 10:16-22 (par. Luke 12:11-12), and there apply to the upcoming preaching ministry of the twelve disciples.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Another, more cryptic indication that the disciples’ witness would be accompanied by rejection is Mark’s placement of the account of John the Baptist’s martyrdom between Jesus’ sending of His disciples and their return (Mark 6:7-32). According to Edwards, “The sandwich structure draws mission and martyrdom, discipleship and death, into an inseparable relationship…. whoever would follow Jesus must first reckon with the fate of John.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

Not only ministry, but even discipleship can result in persecution. In Mark 8:34-37 (par. Matt 16:24-26 and Luke 9:23-25), Jesus depicts Christian discipleship “in terms of suffering and persecution.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Plummer observes that these words are preserved nearly verbatim in all three gospels, concluding, “We may believe that it was regarded as one of the chief treasures among Christ’s remembered Sayings.”[[71]](#footnote-71) Many observe that the mention of the cross in this passage, while not exclusively referring to martyrdom, strongly implies it.[[72]](#footnote-72)

The Synoptics also stress the continuity between the suffering of the prophets and that of the disciples, further reinforcing our persecution paradigm. Gundry observes how the disciples will be rejected like the prophets “who were before them” (Matt 5:12).”[[73]](#footnote-73) This puts them “in the true succession of God's faithful servants.”[[74]](#footnote-74) In Matthew 23:29-36, Jesus further elaborates on the persecution of the prophets, predicting also the future rejection of the disciples He is sending “in the same role.”[[75]](#footnote-75) Cunningham, after his exhaustive review of persecution in both Luke and Acts, reaches the same conclusion: “The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

The Fourth Gospel also clearly depicts the moral/spiritual dichotomy we have been describing in this chapter. Here it is seen in the contrasting metaphors of light and darkness, above and below, life and death. In the Gospel of John, Jesus comes into the world as light into darkness, which the darkness unequivocally rejects (John 1:5-10). Only those chosen out of the world become partakers of the light, and the consequence for this exodus from the world is to receive its hatred and rejection (John 15:18-25). This antagonistic relationship with the world can have fatal consequences for the disciples (John 16:2). In particular, this appears to be Peter’s destiny (John 21:18-19).[[77]](#footnote-77)

The Book of Acts demonstrates, from beginning to end, not only the successful expansion of gospel preaching, but also the consistent rejection and hostility of the unbelieving world.[[78]](#footnote-78) As Cunningham writes, “Persecution is an almost omnipresent plot device in Luke's second volume.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

In nearly every chapter of this narrative, the Church is encountering resistance and rejection. In chapters 4-5, the apostles are arrested. In chapters 6-7, they stand before the Sanhedrin are eventually beaten. After this, the entire church is subject to persecution (8:1-3), especially at the hands of Saul (9:1-5). In chapter 12, Peter and James are arrested and the latter is martyred. During their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas met with opposition (13:5-8; 14:15-16, 19). The same occurred during Paul’s second trip (16:22-24; 17:13-15) and his third (Acts 19:9, 23-40). The final chapters of Acts record Paul’s imprisonment (21-28).

Thus, as the story of the Acts unfolds, we see repeated trials, imprisonments, and the first Christian martyrdoms of Stephen and James. It is “through many tribulations” that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).[[80]](#footnote-80) Here (as well as in Acts 9:16) we see the “particle of necessity” (δεῖ) in connection with Christian suffering.[[81]](#footnote-81) The apostle Paul testifies that in every city “bonds and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:23). We note that the Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison – an omen for the future destiny of the Church.

Beyerhaus observes, “From her origin to her perfection, it is central to the very nature of the faithful Church to be hated and persecuted by the world.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Similarly, Royal concludes, “Persecution of Christians was not an odd occurrence, but the normal course of affairs in a world where good and evil are in competition with each other for our ultimate allegiance.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

The persecution of the saints was not only the experience of the Early Church, but also a topic discussed in the New Testament epistles. Paul states, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). He enlightens the congregation in Philippi, “To you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Peter also affirms, “You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). John adds, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 Jn 3:13).

It is curious to note that not infrequently persecution would arise for reasons other than religious. The Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus because of jealousy over the popularity of His ministry (Mk 15:10). Paul and Silas encountered persecution in Philippi because they cast a demon out a girl who was bringing money to her masters by practicing divination (Acts 16:19-21). Citing the Old Testament, Daniel was persecuted because he “began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps” (Dan 6:1-5). These examples are an indication of the action of evil spirits in persecution. The devil would incite people against the Church for personal reasons, but his real motive was to stop the spread of the gospel.

The New Testament implicates the Jews as those primarily responsible for the opposition to Christianity in its early years.[[84]](#footnote-84) Frend concurs that one could characterize the initial conflict as a “fratricidal clash between rival groups of Jews,” in which “the Roman authorities were only indirectly concerned.”[[85]](#footnote-85) It is the “Jews” who cry for Christ’s execution before a pagan Roman governor who had hoped to release Him (John 19:7-12). Peter’s arrest also pleases the “Jews” (Acts 12:3). The “Jews” are constantly stirring up the Gentiles against Paul’s ministry (Acts 13:50, 14:2, 19, 17:5, 13, 18:12) and plotting to put him to death (Acts 9:23, 20:3, 19, 21:11, 27, 23:12). It is the Jews who “both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out” (1 Thess 2:15). They are the allegorical Ishmael, “born according to the flesh,” who persecutes Isaac, born “according to the Spirit” (Gal 4:29). Zumstein writes,

*The opposition* to the Word is the unbelieving Jews, personified notably by the Sanhedrin…. these are not only the Jews of Jerusalem, but of the whole Empire (6:9)…. the chosen people, disseminated through the whole inhabited earth, find their unanimity not only by rejecting the Word, but also by persecuting its messengers.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Besides the biblical record, Jews reportedly killed Christians during the Bar-Cocheba revolt.[[87]](#footnote-87) In addition, in the late first century A.D. a rabbinic anathema, the Eighteenth Benediction or *Birkath ha-Minim*, was issued against the “Minim,” who are generally identified with followers of Jesus.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Several authors have strenuously argued that the Jews waged no *persistent*, organized persecution against believers in the Messiah. Parks[[89]](#footnote-89) attempts to document that Jews actively opposed Christianity only in the first century. In reviewing the earliest of the *Acta Sanctorum*,he notes that although the Jews still had hostile feelings toward the church during the Roman persecutions, cases of actual Jewish-led persecution were rare. He interprets the initial persecutions by the Jews documented in Acts as simply their attempt to rid the synagogues of Christian influence.

Hare[[90]](#footnote-90) also asserts that the Jews killed few Christians, and that these suffered from mob-violence, not from a judicial decision.[[91]](#footnote-91) He attributes the killings of James, son of Zebedee, to Herod alone, and that of James the Just to a “personal vendetta” by a jealous high priest. Matthew, according to Hare, was reacting in his gospel to the failure of the mission to Israel and their rejection of the gospel when indicting the Jews for persecuting the faith.

We may accept the assertion that soon after the New Testament period the Jewish persecution lessened. A new player, as we will soon see, represented the domain of darkness after this time – the Roman Empire. During the New Testament period, however, the consistent biblical witness reviewed above should not be undervalued. The Bible faithfully portrays unbelieving Israel of New Testament times as the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9), aggressively opposed to Christianity. During this period, they represented “The City of This World,” the primary antagonist of the “City of God.”

**6. The Early Church and Rome**

Although the Scriptures, giving their inspired interpretation of history, provide us with the most authoritative basis for establishing a “persecution paradigm,” a brief glance at church history can provide further confirmation, as did our glance at intertestamental times.

After the New Testament period, Christianity sufficiently distanced itself from Judaism (geographically, ethnically, and doctrinally) so that the latter ceased to be its major threat. In its place, the Roman Empire became the main agent of persecution in the West.[[92]](#footnote-92) Allard reports that in the years before Constantine, the Church underwent persecution about half of that time.[[93]](#footnote-93) Workman characterizes the persecution more as “intensive” than “extensive,” with a significant escalation from the mid-second century. At times, the number of deaths per day could average from one hundred (as per Eusebius) to five thousand (as per Jerome).[[94]](#footnote-94)

Early on, believers began to record and compile various individual accounts of martyrdom – the *Acts of the Martyrs*. Modern scholars have carefully investigated these records for historical accuracy. In an extensive work entitled *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*,Herbert Musurillo summarizes twenty-eight martyr accounts he feels to be reliable.[[95]](#footnote-95) Timothy Barnes focuses on martyrdoms before A.D. 250 and endorses a number of those listed by Musurillo, while challenging the historicity of others.[[96]](#footnote-96) E. C. E. Owen also defends the historicity of many accounts, appealing for support to accurate dates, proper judicial procedures, proper use of terms, and the general absence of the supernatural, except for extraordinary faith.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Among the most popular and controversial of the *Acts* is the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, the supernatural elements of which have aroused skepticism, especially among those with anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions.[[98]](#footnote-98) Although some may challenge the *Acts* historicity on the grounds of its similarity to Jewish and pagan martyr accounts, van Henten aptly defends the thesis that the similarities are likely due to common experience and not literary dependence.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Conflict with Rome, according to Healy, was inevitable and totally irreconcilable: “Since Christianity struck at the very existence of the pagan creeds and cults and sapped the foundations of political and social life, the hostility it provoked came from such causes and was of such a nature that it could never cease until such time as Christianity had triumphed over the established order or had itself been annihilated.”[[100]](#footnote-100) In addition to this, however, we must affirm with Frend that the struggle was ultimately “cosmic,” not political, against Satan, not Rome: “The persecution they were suffering was the sure precursor of the time of Antichrist which in turn would usher in the Millennium of the Saints.”[[101]](#footnote-101)

Beyond reflection on the persecutions themselves, our persecution paradigm is supported by writers who lived during this period as well. Lesbaupin relates that the Church Fathers in general viewed persecution as the normal fare for God’s people. He summarizes Hippolytus, for example, as teaching that “the church should be poor, without possessions, and in permanent conflict with the world.”[[102]](#footnote-102) This opinion was still voiced even after the cessation of hostilities. Straw, summarizing Gregory the Great, writes that from Abel “endurance of persecution distinguishes God’s elect throughout time: their defining essence lies in suffering and sacrifice.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

The most celebrated work of this period on this topic is Augustine’s *City of God*.[[104]](#footnote-104) Beginning from Genesis 1, Augustine sees a separation of good from evil when light (good angels) was separated from darkness (evil angels) (11.19). Augustine then argues that Cain, with his descendants, “belonged to the city of men,” while Abel, with his descendants, “belonged to the city of God.” (14.1). He then contrasts Shem, “of whom Christ was born in the flesh,” with Ham, who signifies “the tribe of heretics” (16.2). Consequently, “Genuine godliness had survived only in those generations which descend from Shem through Arphaxad and reach to Abraham” (16.10). After tracing the City of God to the nation of Israel, Augustine begins to make a distinction between carnal Israel and true Israel; these sides are personified in Saul and David. Finally, the Jewish nation is divided between those who accept Messiah Jesus and the “wicked Jews” who do not (Book 17). During the post-apostolic age, persecutors and heretics represent the City of This World. Antichrist is to usher in the final persecution (Book 18).[[105]](#footnote-105)

**7. Protestants and Romans Catholics during the Reformation**

The Church enjoyed a time of relative peace during the Middle Ages (although one wonders how faithfully it represented the City of God at this time). The Reformation, however, introduced unprecedented conflict within confessing Christianity. This period of time resembles the monarchical age in Israel, when the opposition was not from an “outside” agent, but between true members of God’s people and nominal ones.

Gregg reports that about 4400 Protestants were martyred in the sixteenth century.[[106]](#footnote-106) The events of this period were recorded and interpreted in martyrologies. The most notable protestant versions were written by Ludwig Rabus (Lutheran), Jean Crespin (Reformed), Adriaen Cornelis van Haemstede (Reformed), John Foxe (Anglican), and Thieleman J. van Braght (Anabaptist). Boudin basically confirms the historicity of these accounts, arguing that although the goal was to gain support for their cause, this does not necessarily imply gross falsification of facts. If significant distortions of the historical facts were written to near contemporaries of the events, the martyrologies would have immediately been discredited.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Haemstede is credited with being the first to link the sufferings of the Protestants with that of the Early Church, and even that of the Old Testament prophets.[[108]](#footnote-108) He felt that “the true Church has always been a suffering, and often a persecuted, remnant, existing among a fallen people repeatedly.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Rabus traced the history of martyrdom back to Abel, including the Maccabean martyrs as well.[[110]](#footnote-110) The Protestant martyrologists also “canonized” medieval non-conformists such as the Waldenses and Lollards in response to the Catholic charge that Protestants were reintroducing their heresies. The Protestants, with some qualifications, gladly identified with these “medieval martyrs,” since they provided yet another link in the ongoing chain of persecution of the true, “suffering” church.[[111]](#footnote-111)

As we have consistently noted in other periods, the Protestant martyrologists also acknowledged the “higher level” conflict. Rabus and Foxe, for example, both claimed that the true struggle during the Reformation was between God and Satan.[[112]](#footnote-112) Van Braght saw two great distinct “congregations and churches, the one of God and from heaven, the other of Satan and from the earth.”[[113]](#footnote-113)

Not only the martyrologists, but the Reformers themselves also taught along the lines of the persecution paradigm we are presenting here. Luther felt that the Church “had always been persecuted” and “would be persecuted to the end of the world.”[[114]](#footnote-114) In Luther’s words, “Those who have the true Word of God must suffer for it.”[[115]](#footnote-115) Luther also says, “Nor is there any better proof that the Protestants are the true Church than the stranglings, drownings, and hangings inflicted upon them, as the Cross on their Lord.”[[116]](#footnote-116) Persecution is their “*criterion of faithfulness*.”[[117]](#footnote-117) Luther also recognized the cosmic nature of the struggle – the persecutions were authored by Satan.[[118]](#footnote-118) In like manner, Calvin felt persecution to be a mark of the true church. Therefore, “To suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake is a singular comfort.”[[119]](#footnote-119) He always saw himself as part of a minority, even when he headed Geneva.[[120]](#footnote-120)

The Anabaptist theology of martyrdom was integrally tied with their strong dualistic view of history as an ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of darkness and light.[[121]](#footnote-121) According to the Anabaptists, “The path of martyrdom” marks the way “of the people of God through history.”[[122]](#footnote-122) This history traces back to Abel and includes the Jewish intertestamental martyrdoms as well.[[123]](#footnote-123) They also see persecution as satanically inspired: “The hatred which raged against the head of all martyrs is not only the hatred of the children of this world against the people of God but the very hatred of Darkness against the Light.”[[124]](#footnote-124)

Nonetheless, my attempt to cast Reformation Protestants as the persecuted, “true” church, the representatives of the City of God, is complicated by the fact that about three hundred English Catholics also perished at Protestant hands,[[125]](#footnote-125) as did many Anabaptist martyrs. Gregg’s work *Salvation at Stake* describes this time as a period of confusion, where rival doctrinal claims were supported by rival martyrdom claims. Christians of various confessions “died for their fidelity to Christ, but they disagreed about what it meant to be a Christian.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Both sides claimed that their martyrs validated their cause.

Since both sides could claim martyrs, attempts were made to distinguish true from false martyrs. Features like the manner in which they died, their social or education status, and the eventual fall of their persecutors were used as distinguishing marks. Yet, apparently none of these criteria was convincing: “Catholic and Protestant have died with equal constancy in defense of their creed.”[[127]](#footnote-127) As Gregg writes, “Attempts to find non-doctrinal criteria for telling true from false martyrs were hesitant and ultimately unsuccessful.”[[128]](#footnote-128) Consequently, “Martyrdom began and ended with divergent views of Christian truth.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

Doctrinal differences between Lutheran and Reformed also cloud the picture of a united front against medieval Catholicism, the representative of the City of This World. According to Gregg, the writings of martyrologists tend to imply a “unity that Protestants themselves knew did not exist.”[[130]](#footnote-130) In addition, contrary to expectations, the primary Reformers were spared martyrdom. Luther struggled not only with this fact, but also that “heretic” Anabaptist martyrs met death with great bravery.[[131]](#footnote-131) Swiss Calvinists also struggled with the political success they enjoyed in their domains and continually sought to “reinvent themselves as a minority.”[[132]](#footnote-132) After the Reformation period proper, the confusion further increased as to who was really “on God’s side” as Separatists and other non-conformist groups suffered at the hands of the (now protestant) Church of England.[[133]](#footnote-133)

These observations appear to challenge my application of the “Protestant verses medieval Catholic” scenario to our persecution paradigm. Yet, several things can be said in defense. First, the Catholic martyrs numbered about one tenth of the Protestant martyrs. Although this does not excuse the Protestants’ ill treatment of Catholics, we see here a greater bent toward violence from the Roman side. That the Catholic martyrs perished in England is also significant in light of Henry VIII's *Act of Supremacy*, which made it treason to refuse an oath acknowledging him as head of the Church of England.[[134]](#footnote-134) Clearly the issue was political loyalty as much as or more than religious conviction. One could also easily question the authenticity of Henry’s personal Christian faith.

Concerning the persecution of Anabaptists, it has been noted, “The most blood was shed in Roman Catholic countries.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Cornelius reports, “In Tyrol and Goerz… the number of executions in the year 1531 reached already one thousand; in Ensisheim, six hundred. At Linz seventy-three were killed in six weeks.”[[136]](#footnote-136) By comparison, in Zwingli’s Zurich, where the Anabaptist movement began, there were only six Anabaptist executions from 1527 to 1532.[[137]](#footnote-137) Luther “expressed his dissent from the harsh and cruel treatment of the Anabaptists, and maintained that they ought to be resisted only by the Word of God and arguments, not by fire and sword.”[[138]](#footnote-138) This is in stark contrast to the sentiments of Catholic leadership toward Protestantism.

Thus, in the Reformation time we continue to see evidence of the polarization between the City of God and the City of This World and the antagonism of the latter toward the former in the persecutions of Protestants by the Roman Catholic Church. The limited, but unfortunate persecution of Catholics by Protestants can be explained as essentially political and not religious. Persecution of more “progressive” Protestants, such as Anabaptists and English Separatists or Puritans, by earlier Protestant movements is consistent with our persecution paradigm as well, in that previously persecuted parties can quickly become the persecutors of the next move of God.

**8. Antichrist and the Church in the Last Days**

We now bring our survey to modern times and beyond. From a Western perspective, the Church presently seems to be enjoying great peace and prosperity. However, the picture of Christianity on a worldwide scale is quite different. Authors commonly refer to the twentieth century as “one of the great ages of Christian martyrs.”[[139]](#footnote-139) Twentieth century martyrs number well into the millions.[[140]](#footnote-140) Dana writes, “No century has mounted so vast or sustained an attack on Christianity as the present one.”[[141]](#footnote-141) Beyerhaus confirms, “*Our 20th century is the bloodiest in the entire history of Christianity*.”[[142]](#footnote-142) Even Christians now enjoying political recognition and protection must be forewarned that the “proportion of legal Christianity is rapidly decreasing.”[[143]](#footnote-143)

Although the enemies of Christianity in modern times have been several, atheistic Communism has likely provided the clearest representation of the City of This World in the last century. Their efforts both to exterminate Christianity locally and expand their influence worldwide presented a significant threat. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam may become the next major antagonist, seeing how Islamic Fundamentalists are taking a more aggressive posture internationally.

Although we can only tentatively predict the next great opponent of the church, we can with certainty anticipate her ultimate confrontation. Many Evangelicals anticipate a final and climatic manifestation of Satan’s kingdom at the end of time in the enigmatic person of Antichrist. His coming will usher in the most intense struggle between the Cities of God and This World, which finds its resolution in the physical return of Christ.

The Man of Lawlessness’s campaign against the church is most clearly depicted in the Book of Revelation, where we see “the final battle between the opposing kingdoms of Christ and Antichrist.”[[144]](#footnote-144) The Antichrist is depicted as a beast, who is given “to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev 13:7). Earlier, Daniel predicted, “He will wear down the saints of the Highest One” (Dan 7:25). His followers “poured out the blood of saints and prophets” (Rev 16:6). The Great Harlot was “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Rev 17:6), and in Babylon the Great “was found the blood of prophets and of saints” (Rev 18:24). Here the demarcation between the kingdoms of darkness and light is sharply drawn – the world is depicted as “implacably hostile” to the church.[[145]](#footnote-145) There is no middle ground or third option – one must choose Christ or Antichrist.

Michelle Lee discerns this tension in the chiastic structure of the Apocalypse. She locates the central (emphatic) elements of the chiasm in Rev 13:1-18 and Rev 14:1-20, entitling both a “Moment of Decision.”[[146]](#footnote-146) These sections present a striking portrayal of the “choice between martyrdom and eternal life or earthly life and eternal torment.”[[147]](#footnote-147) The text causes readers “to identify their own place in the cosmic drama and forces them to choose sides in the battle between good and evil.”[[148]](#footnote-148)

Revelation not only predicts tribulation for God’s people – it presents this time as the climax of the historical struggle we have been outlining. As Boring comments, the Old Testament allusions in Revelation cast the end-time persecution in the context of “God’s mighty acts in history”: “The present persecution is in continuity with the history of the people of God in the past, in which anti-God powers of oppression and injustice which seemed to be in control of the world were overthrown by the liberating act of God.”[[149]](#footnote-149) Beyond simply predicting persecution, the book of Revelation speaks much of martyrdom; one author entitles it “A Handbook for Martyrs.”[[150]](#footnote-150) The book contains many clear references to martyrdom (2:10, 13, 6:11, 11:7, 13:7, 16:6, 17:6, 20:4). Yet the “triumph” of the City of This World is only temporary, as many other passages in Revelation make clear.

### C. Conclusions

In this section, I have argued that the people of God have typically been set in contrast to and persecuted by the City of This World. The “World” is represented in Scripture and history by various prominent oppressors: Cain, Egypt, Canaan, backslidden Israel, Antiochus Epiphanies, unbelieving Jews of the first century, the Roman Empire, the medieval Roman Catholic Church, Communism and, eventually, Antichrist.

We will conclude our survey with some more practical thoughts. First, Scripture urges us to not fear persecution (Neh 4:14; Isa 51: 7-14; Jer 1:8; Phil 1:28-29). Even when threatened by death, Jesus counsels, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do” (Lk 12:4). Suffering should not be a reason to be ashamed of our faith (2 Tim 1:8-12) or to recant it (Matt 10:32-33).

In the same way, persecution should not be a reason to cease laboring for the Lord. In spite of opposition, Nehemiah continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 4:6). The psalmist held onto the Word in the face of opposition (Ps 119:157, 161). Both Jesus and His disciples continued to preach the Kingdom of God, even when persecuted (Jn 7:26; Acts 4:19-20; 5:28-29, 40-42; 1 Thes 2:2).

Perseverance is needed in time of suffering. Paul advises his comrade Timothy to endure suffering “as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:3). Jesus praised the Ephesian church, “You have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary” (Rev 2:3; сf. 14:12). At times, Jesus’ disciples are called to endure to the end, i.e., undergo martyrdom (Rev 12:11). Finally, James lauds the perseverance displayed by the prophets (Jam 5:10). Scripture notes one instance where God gave a prophet supernatural endurance – Jeremiah: “Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you” (Jer 15:20). Similarly, the Lord gave special support to Elijah through an angelic visitation, “supernatural” food, and a personal encounter on Mount Horeb (1 Kin 19). Paul also received divine aid during his trial: “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (2 Tim 4:17). The knowledge that Christian suffering is temporary and the common experience of believers also provides comfort (1 Pet 5:9-10).

On the other hand, the Bible testifies of many instances where God delivered His servants from persecution. The Lord gave such promises to Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 19; 15:20). Additionally, God promised through Isaiah to strengthen His people through trial and deliver them (Isa 41:10-12; 43:2).

Among his many sufferings for Christ, the apostle Paul also experienced the Lord’s protection and deliverance (Acts 18:9; 23:23-31), so that at the end of his life he could claim, “What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!” (2 Tim 3:11). At the same time, when Paul speaks of “deliverance” he sometimes in speaking of spiritual deliverance, not physical. In particular, in Philippians 1:19-20 it is not totally clear is Paul is speaking of being delivered from prison, or of receiving strength to endure martyrdom:

For I know that 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.

In times of suffering, one must not forget God’s sovereignty. God has all authority and can end the persecution at any moment. For example, in the book of Revelation Jesus informed the church in Smyrna that they would “have tribulation ten days” (Rev 2:10). Daniel 11:35 also speaks of persecution until “the appointed time.”

The Bible relates that during suffering, God’s people turn to Him in prayer. When Israel’s enemies tried to stop the reconstruction of Jerusalem, Nehemiah sought the Lord (Neh 4:9). When the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem, Hezekiah “took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of Yahweh and spread it out before Yahweh. Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh” (Isa 37:14-15). In New Testament times, after the Jewish leaders threatened the apostles the Jerusalem church prayed for courage to preach the Word (Acts 4:24-30).

Another source of comfort during suffering is the knowledge that our sufferings for Christ themselves may have redemptive results. Paul reported that because of his imprisonment for the Lord “has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Phil 1:13-14). Furthermore, the Lord granted Paul special comfort in his sufferings that he was able to pass on to others (2 Cor 1:4-6). In addition, Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” which consisted of difficulties connected with his ministry, prevented him from boasting in his accomplishments (2 Cor 12:7-10). Moreover, persecution gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our faith. Jesus charged the church in Smyrna, “Be faithful until death” (Rev 2:10). Finally, testings and trials prompt us to draw closer to the Lord (Ps 27).

Some feel that those who suffer for Jesus receive a special reward from the Lord and a higher status in His Kingdom. When James and John requested from Jesus status in His Kingdom, He replied, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” (Matt 20:22), meaning participation in His sufferings. In addition, although all believers take part in the first resurrection and in Messiah’s early reign, Revelation 20:4 highlights the martyrs’ participation in these events.

How are God’s people to relate to their persecutors? In the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, we often encounter prayers for their downfall. Nehemiah prayed in this way for those who hindered the reconstruction work on Jerusalem:

Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders (Neh 4:4-5).

In the New Testament, however, we see a different approach. Jesus taught His disciples, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44). When Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus, the Lord rebuked him (Lk 22:49-51). Correspondingly, Peter writes in his first epistle, “…not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead” (1 Pet 3:9). We witness a prime example of this attitude in Jesus (Lk 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60), who, at the point of death, forgave their persecutors.

Elsewhere, the Bible again charges us, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom 12:19). The Scriptures often record God’s promise to avenge His people (e.g. 2 Thes 1:6; Rev 16:6; 19:2) as well as examples when He did so (e.g. Dan 6:24; Esther 6:11).

Some wonder whether it is ever appropriate to flee persecution. The Early Church hotly debated the question.[[151]](#footnote-151) It is important to note that Jesus Himself taught that one should flee persecution (Matt 10:23; Mk 13:14-16). In regard to Paul, Raymor relates that he used every legal means available to him to avoid persecution.[[152]](#footnote-152) So then, fleeing persecution is not tantamount to denying Christ.

On the other hand, Karl Barth feels that after fleeing persecution, the believer is obliged to continue evangelizing at his or her new location, and, most likely, more opposition will result.[[153]](#footnote-153) Roberts makes the fair observation that when someone is captured, then it is time to prepare to suffer, unless a new opportunity to flee presents itself.[[154]](#footnote-154) Gundry advises striking a balance between faithfulness in discipleship and preservation of one’ life. Such a balance prevents the corresponding extremes of compromise and spiritual pride. Keener correctly concludes that most people can reasonably distinguish fleeing persecution from an open denial of the faith.[[155]](#footnote-155)

Although persecution is unpleasant, both talking about it, and especially experiencing it, nonetheless, Jesus established the principle that believers should rejoice in their sufferings for Him (Matt 5:10). Rejection by the world is a sign of belonging to God’s Kingdom. We recall the words of Peter, himself a partaker of Christ’s sufferings, “To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation (1 Pet 4:13). Peter did exactly that when the apostles were beaten for their witness of Jesus: “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for {His} name” (Acts 5:41).

1. Berkhof L. Systematic Theology. – 4th ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941. – P. 453. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Campbell C. R. Paul and union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. – P. 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In this regard, Wikenhauser comments that in describing the “afflictions of Christ” in Colossians 1:24, Paul employs the term θλῖψις (*phlipsis*), which is never used in relation to Jesus’ redemptive sufferings (Wikenhauser A. Pauline mysticism / Trans. J. Cunnigham. – Friebrug: Herder, 1960. – P. 160). Also see Bouttier M. Christianity according to Paul / Trans. F. Clarke // Moule C. F. D. Studies in Biblical Theology – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966. – P. 82-83, who calls Paul’s sufferings not “redemptive,” but “eschatological.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lenski R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel. – Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1943. – P. 624. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mueller D. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 424. Macaskill reasons the same (see Macaskill G. Union with Christ in the New Testament. – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. – P. 246). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tannehill R. C. Dying and rising in Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology. – Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1966. – P. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This chapter follows the tradition of the Reformation martyriologists, who also sought to show continuity between various persecutions of God’s people. It especially resembles the work of Lutheran martyriologist Ludwig Rabus, who traced persecution back to Cain and Abel. See discussion in Boudin H. R. Les martyrologes protestants de la réforme. Instruments de propagande ou documents de témoignage?” // Marx J. Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du livre, in Marx J. Problèmes d’historie du Christianisme, ed. Jacques Marx, no. 19. – Brussels: University of Brussels, 1989. – P. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Adherents include Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and, among modern commentators, Kenneth Matthews (see Matthews K. A. Genesis 1-11:26 // Clendenen R. E. The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 329). Josephus also links character to lineage: “The posterity of Cain became exceeding wicked, every one successively dying one after another more wicked than the former,” while Seth left “children behind him who imitated his virtues” (*Ant.* 1.66, 68); Quotation from Whiston W., ed., The Works of Josephus. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1987. – Page number not noted. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. These passages, however, do not refer to Cain and Abel in a typological sense, since other characters are listed in the contexts as examples of good and bad behavior as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dodd C. H. The Johannine Epistles // Moffatt J. The Moffatt New Testament Commentary. – London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946. – P. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Grayston K. The Johannine Epistles // Clements R. E., Black, M. New Century Bible Commentary. – London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984. – P. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Delitzsch F. A New Commentary on Genesis*,* vol. 1 / Trans. Sophia Taylor. – Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, n.d. – P. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Testament of Benjamim,* 7.5. Citation taken from Kruse C. G. The Letters of John // Carson D. A. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Quotations from Judaeus Philo. The Works of Philo / Trans. C. D. Yonge. – Rev. ed. – Philadelphia, PA: Hendrickson, 1995. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cyprian, *Epistles,* 55.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Stauffer E. The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom // The Mennonite Quarterly Review 19. 1945. P. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Delitzsch, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Speiser E. A. Genesis // Albright W. F., Freedman D. N. The Anchor Bible. – New York: Doubleday, 1962. – P. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hamilton V. P. The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17 // Harrison R. K. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. – P. 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Material suggested by Graham Cole in reviewing this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Matthews notes the parallel between the curse of Cain (Gen 4:11) and the curse of Canaan (Gen 9:25). See Matthews K. A. Genesis 1-11:26 // Clendenen R. E. The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Tertullian also recognizes the persecution of the prophets as a continuation of the Cain-Abel conflict: “As soon as God has begun to be worshipped, religion has got ill-will for her portion. He who had pleased God is slain, and that by his brother…. ungodliness made the object of its pursuit, finally, that not only of righteous persons, but even of prophets also” (Tertullian, *Scorp.,* 7). Fischel concurs, “The whole history of the prophets from Abel on seems to be linked by a chain of genuine and exemplary martyrdoms.” See Fischel H. A. Martyr and Prophet // The Jewish Quarterly Review 37. 1947. P. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Elijah is reminded of this. See Rom 11:3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bromiley G. W. Persecution // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986. – V. 3. – P. 772. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Although Calvin and others date Psalm 44 during the Maccabean persecutions, others convincingly argue that the Psalm simply records Israel’s quest to understand their defeat in battle when they had done nothing to deserve it. Nonetheless, even in the latter proposal the element of persecution is preserved in that Israel’s suffering was in part because of the Gentiles’ hatred of their religion. See VanGemeren W. A., Ross A. P., Wright J. S., Kinlaw D. F. Psalms-Song of Songs // Gaebelein F. E. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991. – V. 5. – P. 337, 441; Briggs C. A., Briggs E. G.A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Psalms // Driver S. R., Plummer A., Briggs C. A. The Interntational Critical Commentary. – Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1906. – P. 376, 381; Anderson A. A. The Book of Psalms // Clements R. E., Black, M. New Century Bible. – London: Oliphants, 1972. – V. 1. – P. 337, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bright J. Jeremiah // Albright W. F., Freedman D. N. The Anchor Bible. – New York: Doubelday, 1965. – P. xx-xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Pobee J. S. Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul // Chilton B. D. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series. no. 6. – Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1985. – P. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Matt 21:33-40 (par. Luke 20:9-19); Matt 22:1-14, 23:29-39 (par. Luke 11:47-51, 13:34-35); Acts 7:52; Heb 11:37; and 1 Thess 2:15. Gilliard strenuously, but unconvincingly argues that in 1 Thessalonians 2:15, Paul had “Christian prophets” in view. See Gilliard F. Paul and the Killing of the Prophets in 1 Thes. 2:15 // Novum Testamentum. 36. 1994. P. 259-270. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Baumeister T. Martyrdom and Persecution in Early Christianity // Concilium. 163. March 1983. P. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See, for example, Schoeps H. Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde // Symbolae Biblicae Upsalienses. 2. 1943. P. 1-22; Amaru B. H. The Killing of the Prophets: Unraveling a Midrash // Hebrew Union College Annual. 54. 1983. P. 153-180; Baumeister T. Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums // Kötting B., Ratzinger J. Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie. – Münster: Aschendorff, 1980. – P. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Schoeps, p. 22; Amaru, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Pobee, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bright objects, not to the historicity of this event, but to its timing in the reign of Jehoiakim since Jeremiah’s trial occurred early in this king’s reign. He also argues that this is a later insertion since it apparently contributes nothing to the argument at hand. See Bright, p. 172. On the other hand, Holladay defends the integrity of the text based on strong linguistic evidence. See Holladay W.J. Jeremiah 2 / Ed. P. D. Hanson // Moore F. Hermeneia. – Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989. - P. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Holladay notes that the *hitpa’el* “prophesied,” used of Uriah in verse 20, is elsewhere used in Jeremiah for false or “mad” prophets (14:14, 23:13, 29:26) and concludes that Uriah was simply “a contemporary of the narrator” who “made prophetic claims” and “nothing at this point is implied about the rightness or wrongness of his message.” See Holladay, Jeremiah 2, p. 109. One can respond that “nothing else in the passage supports Holladay’s interpretation of the *hitpa’el* form as an indication that Uriah was prophesying falsely. In fact, the *nif’al* of the same verbal root is used in the second half of the verse. R. Wilson’s explanation of the *hitpa’el* of נכא as ‘act the way prophets act’ is appropriate here (R. Wilson, *Prophecy*, 335–36).” From Keown G., Scalise P. J., Smothers T. G. Jeremiah 26-52 // Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1995. – P. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Although Zechariah is not called a prophet in Scripture, his prophetic rebuke resulted in his death, and he is recognized as a prophet by the rabbis (see *Lam.* *R.* 2.4, 4.16). Also notable is his being “clothed” with the Spirit (v. 20), a phrase that “refers to the exercise of a prophetic gift” (Selman M. J. 1 and 2 Chronicles // Wiseman D. J. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. – Leicester: IVP, 1994. – P. 455). Some feel his designation as a prophet may have arisen due to the confusion in the Jewish and early Christian literature (and apparently also in Matthew 23:35) of this Zechariah with Zechariah the son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah (Isa 8:2), and even Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. See discussion in Amaru, p. 167-169. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Montgomery J. A. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings / Ed. Gehman H. S. // Driver S. R., Plummer A., Briggs C. A. The International Critical Commentary. – Ediburg: T. & T. Clark, 1951. – P. 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Gray J. I and II Kings // Wright G. E., Bright J., Barr J., Ackroyd P. The Old Testament Library. – Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963. – P. 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Kidner correctly observes that although this accusation corresponds chronologically in the prayer of Nehemiah 9 to the times of the judges, it projects a perspective on the prophets beyond that time. See Kidner D. Ezra and Nehemiah. // Wiseman D. J. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. – Leicester: IVP, 1979. – P. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Clines D. J. A. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther // Clements R. E., Black M. New Century Bible Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984. – P. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Jeremiah may have had in view here the pogrom of Manasseh recorded in 2 Kgs 21:16. See Keown, Scalise, Smothers, p. 183; Bright, p. 16. Josephus also accuses Manasseh, “Nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them” (*Ant.* 10.3.1, in *Works of Josephus*, 269). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Septuagint: “In vain I struck your children; you accepted no instruction. A sword has devoured your prophets as a destroying lion, and you were not afraid.” Rahlfs A., ed. Septuaginta. – Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979. – CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, WA.: Logos Research Systems. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cited in McKane W. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah // Emerton J. A., Cranfield C. E. B. – Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1986. – P. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Hoffmann Y. Jeremiah 2:30 // Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*.* 89. 1977. P. 20. Supported by Holladay. See Holladay, Jeremiah 1, p. 106-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Torrey C. C., ed. The Lives of the Prophets. – Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1946. Schoeps gives the “pre-expanded” *Lives* a B.C. date. See Schoeps, p. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. This account is also described in *b. Sanh.* 103b and other Talmudic references (as per Schoeps, p. 7), reported in the pseudepigraphical *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, possibly alluded to in Hebrews 11:37, and endorsed by Origen in his *Com. on Matt.* 10.18. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* 9; Endorsed by Tertuillian in *Scorp.* 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Also in *Visions of Paul*,p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Amaru, p. 154-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Lev R.* 10.3; *Exod R.* 41.7, 48.3; *b. Sanh.* 7a. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Schoeps, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Fischel, p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. As in the previous section, this generalization must also be qualified – there were evil Jews abusing their secular authority to oppress their fellow countrymen. See 2 Maccabees 3-5, for example. Consequently, the Qumran community portrayed the conflict at this time as between false and true Israel. See discussion in Goppelt L. A Commentary on 1 Peter / Trans. J. E. Alsup., Ed. F. Hahn. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – P. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Pobee cites many intertestamental and rabbinic references to Daniel as the “ideal” martyr: *1 Macc*, 2.60; *4 Macc*, 13.9, 16.3, 21, 18:13; Jos. *Ant.* 10.260-63; *Gen R.* 34; *b. Ab. Zar.* 8b. The three Hebrew youths are also mentioned in *b. Sanh.* 93a; *b. Ab. Zar.* 3a; *Ta'am* 18b; *Pes.* 118a, 94a; *1 Macc*, 2.5; *4 Macc*, 13.9, 16, 21, 18:12; *Cant. R.* 7.8; *Pal. Targumim Gen* 38.25. See Pobee, p. 14. Although many assert that the events of Daniel 3 and 6 never took place, we affirm with Leupold that we must respect the historicity of these stories since “a purely fictional deliverance is small comfort to one confronted by a factual peril of death. Solid words of God or solid facts alone avail under such circumstances.” Leupold H. C. Exposition of Daniel. – No city: Wartburg, 1949; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1969. – P. 133 (pages citations are to reprint edition). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Porteous N. W. Daniel // Wright G. E., Bright J. Barr J., Ackroyd P. The Old Testament Library. – Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965. – P. 55; Collins J. Daniel // Cross F. M. Hermeneia. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993. – P. 194, 402; Baldwin J. G. Daniel // Wiseman D. J. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Leicester: IVP, 1978. – P. 66; Kellermann U. Das Danielbuch und die Märtyrertheologie der Auferstehung // Henten J. W. van Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie – Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989. – P. 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Baldwin, p. 196. Porteous notes that the qualification “and if not” in chapter 3 already prepares the reader for this possible outcome. See Porteous, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Smith B. Suffering // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 751. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Porteous, p. 55. Collins, not respecting the historicity of Daniel, goes so far as to suggest that the deliverances of chapters 3 and 6 metaphorically represent the future resurrection of chapter 12 (Collins, p. 194). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Collins, p. 402 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Kellermann, p. 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Wintermute O. S., ed. and trans., Jubilees // Charlesworth J. H. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. – Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985. – V 2. – P. 48. Pobee lists other reference to “the cosmic battle” such as Song of Three Youths 26; Est 10:7, 11:6; *Ps Sol*., 2.29; and when Satan entices Manasseh to kill Isaiah in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*. See Pobee, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Another death during the Maccabean period is recorded in the *Testament of Moses*, chapter 9, where Taxo and his sons flee to the wilderness to escape persecution and die there. Still another is described in *Gen R.* 65.22 where Joseph Meshitha refused to enter the temple to plunder it for the Syrians and was sawn in two. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Hadas defends the historicity of these events, feeling the varying accounts among rabbis (*Lam R.* 1.50; *b. Gittin* 57b; *Seder Eliyahu R.* 29) reflect independent historical sources. The rabbis, however, tell only the story of the seven brothers and, when time is indicated, locate the story in the time of Hadrian. See Hadas M. ed. and trans. The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees // Zeitlin S. Jewish Apocryphal Literature. – New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953. – P. 99-100, 133. Bowersock claims to see literary evidence that these accounts are later insertions into *2 Maccabees*. See Bowersock G. W. Martyrdom and Rome. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995. – P. 11-12. Thus, although the accounts of Eleazar and the seven brothers are likely historical, there is some uncertainty as to exactly when they occurred. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Stauffer, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Among the Synoptic evangelists, Matthew emphasizes persecution the most, followed by Mark. Luke, through some apparently redactional moves, somewhat “softens” the persecution scenario. See discussion of Luke in Beck B. B. “*Imitatio Christi*’ and the Lucan Passion Narrative // Horbury W., McNeil B. Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 34-35, 46; and Dehandschutter B. La persecution des chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres // Kremer J. Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, redaction, théologie. – Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium. № 48. – Leuven: Leuven University, 1979. – P. 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The length and prophetic nature of the discourse appears atypical for Mark’s depiction of Christ. However, Collins dismisses the theory that chapter 13 was a later insertion to explain the delay of the Parousia. See Collins A. Y. The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13 // Segbroeck F. V., Tuckett C. M., Van Belle G., Verheyden J. The Four Gospels, 1992. – Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1992. – V. 2. – P. 1141-1152. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Noted by Lindars В. The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18 – 16:4a // Horbury W., McNeil B. Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 51. Luz insightfully notes that after the instructions for ministry in Matthew 10, there is no record of the Twelve going out to preach – the discourse is meant for the entire church. See Luz U. The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew / Trans. J. B. Robinson. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. – P. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Edwards J. R. The Gospel according to Mark. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002. – P. 189. Similar conclusion in France R. T. The Gospel of Mark // Marshall I. H., Hagner D. A. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. – P. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Telford W. R. The Theology of the Gospel of Mark // Dunn J. D. G. New Testament Theology. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999. – P. 219. O'Neill wrongly concludes that the teaching about taking up the cross was “restricted in application to a limited number of followers and was not meant for all.” He himself recognizes that Luke writes about taking up the cross “daily,” and Mark records how Jesus addresses the crowd with this challenge as well (O'Neill J. C. Did Jesus Teach That His Death Would Be Vicarious as Well as Typical? // Horbury W., McNeil B. Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 11, 16). France writes, “Their inclusion in the audience asserts that the harsh demands of the following verses apply not only to the Twelve but anyone else who may wish to join the movement…. This is not a special formula for the elite, but an essential element in discipleship” (France, Mark, p.339). A similar conclusion is found in Lane W. L. The Gospel According to Mark // Bruce F. F. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974. – P. 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Plummer A. The Gospel According to St. Mark. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1914; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982. – P. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See Lane, p. 307-308; Gundry R. H. Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 200; and Lenski, p. 645. Additionally, Lenski correctly observes, “The cross is that suffering which results from our faithful connection with Christ,” not any kind of suffering, as is popularly understood (ibid., p. 644). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Gundry,p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. France R. T. The Gospel According to Matthew // Morris L. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. – Leicester: IVP, 1985. – P. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. France, Matthew, p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cunningham S. Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts // Porter S. E. Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series. № 142. – Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997. – P. 14, 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Peter’s martyrdom is recorded by Tertullian (*Scorp.* 15) and Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* 3.1.2). The basic historicity of the event is endorsed, among others, by Cullmann. See Cullmann O. Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr / Trans. F. V. Filson. – London: SCM, 1953. – P. 152. The text in John also appears to confirm the record that he was crucified. Many have responded convincingly to the objection that John 21:18 simply describes Peter in old age after a long life of Christian service. See Haenchen E. John 2*:* A Commentary of the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21 / Trans. R. W. Funk. Ed. R. W. Funk and U. Busse // Hermeneia. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984. – P. 226-32; and Beasley-Murray G. R. John // Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. Word Biblical Commentary. – Waco, TX: Word, 1987. – P. 408-409. Potter relates, along with that of Peter, the traditions regarding the martyrdoms of Philip, Matthew, James the Just, Matthias, Andrew, Mark, Simeon, Bartholomew, Thomas, Luke, Simon the Canaanite, Timothy and Barnabas. See Potter F. L. Martyrs in All Ages. – Waukesha, WI: Metropolitan Church Association, 1907. – P. 13-24., [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Petersen, because of the tight literary structure of Acts, rejects its historicity, feeling the author is simply relating a theology of persecution in narrative form. See Petersen N. R. Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics // Via D. O. Guides to Biblical Scholarship. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978. – P. 90-91. Yet, a structuring of historical information does not automatically invalidate its historicity. In addition, Gaventa writes, “Lukan theology is intricately and irreversibly bound up with the story he tells and cannot be separated from it. An attempt to do justice to the theology of Acts must struggle to reclaim the character of Acts as a narrative.” See Gaventa B. R. Toward a Theology of Acts // Interpretation. № 42. 1988. P. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cunningham, p. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Cunningham rightly notes that this passage is located in a context of persecution and therefore refers “to the prospect of persecution for the sake of the faith of the disciples, and not to general troubles and trials of humanity” (Ibid., p. 245-246). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Noted by Rapske В. Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution // Marshall I. H., Peterson D. Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. – P. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Beyerhaus P. P. J. God’s Kingdom and the Utopian Error. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992. – P. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Royal R. The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century. – New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000. – P.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Not all Jews, of course, rejected Christ; His first disciples were all Jewish. Yet, this is not an improper generalization, since the New Testament itself, as we shall see, characterizes the Jews as enemies of the Early Church. The New Testament does this not to indict every ethnic Jew, but to depict the nation of Israel as the prime antagonist of God’s kingdom at this time, that is, as the “City of This World.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Frend W. H. C. Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. – Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965. – P. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Zumstein J. L’Apôtre comme martyr dans les actes de luc” // Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie. №112. 1980. P. 375. My translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Herford feels the Jewish killing of five disciples, recorded in *b. Sanh.* 43a, took place during the revolt, but asserts that outside of this time the Jews undertook no other formal persecution of Christians. See Herford R. T. Christianity in Talmud and Midrash // Library of Religious and Philosophical Thought. – Clifton, NJ: Reference Book, 1966. – P. 90-94. Hare also acknowledges the Jewish killing of Christians at the time of Bar-Cocheba, but argues that it was political and not religious – the Christian’s lack of participation in the war was considered treasonous. See Hare D. A. R. The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew // Black M. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. № 6. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967. – P. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. The Benediction reads, “For the renegades let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarens and the *minim* perish as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.” From Barrett C. K. The New Testament Background: Selected Documents. – London: S.P.C.K., 1956; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1961. – P. 167 (page citations are to the reprint edition). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See Parks J. The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue. – Cleveland, OH: Meridian, 1961. – P. 132, 137-41, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. See Hare, p. 20-22, 30-34, 125-129, 164-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. He claims a dual tradition of Stephen’s martyrdom, arguing that the “judicial-execution” tradition (Acts 6:12-7:1) is unhistorical, and the “mob-lynching” tradition (Acts 7:54-58) is historical. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. In the East, Christians suffered as well. An estimated 190,000 Christians were martyred in Persia by the fifth century. See Chandler A., Harvey A. Introduction // Chandler A. The Terrible Alternative: Christian Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century. – London: Cassell, 1998. – P. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Allard P. Ten Lectures on the Martyrs / Trans. L. Cappadelta. – London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907. – P. 80-81. Traditionally ten great persecutions under Rome are listed. See Augustine, *City of God*, 18.52. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
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97. Owen E. C. E., ed. Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs. – Oxford: Clarendon, 1927. – P. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See comments in Owen, p. 17; and Lefkowitz М. Р. The Motivations for St. Perpetua’s Martyrdom // Journal of the American Academy of Religion. № 44. 1976. P. 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
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101. Frend, p. 15, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
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103. Straw C. Martyrdom and Christian Identity: Gregory the Great, Augustine, and Tradition // Klingshirn W. E., Vessey M. The Limits of Ancient Christianity. – Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999. – P. 255. Straw cites *Mor*. 3.17.32; *Homeliae in Hiezechielem* 2.3.16; and *Hom. Ev.* 2.38.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
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105. In spite of Augustine’s allegorizing, he is generally accurate in his construal. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
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107. Boudin, p. 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
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130. Ibid., 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Bagchi, p. 212-213. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Pettegree, p. 249-251 [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Knott, Discourses, p. 120-122, 134-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
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142. Beyerhaus, p. 167. Italics original. Carson rightfully observes, however, that the large numbers are partially due to the larger world population and larger number of Christians. See Carson D. A. How Long, O Lord?– Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Barrett, Johnson, Our World, p. 44. In assessing Barrett’s comment, however, one must take into consideration the 1990 date of this book, before the fall of the Soviet Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Beyerhaus, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
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151. Tertullian, for example, spoke out against fleeing persecution, while Clement of Alexandria was not opposed to it (noted in Bowersock, p. 54). Pettersen summarizes the defense for fleeing persecution proposed by Athanasius: (1) a successful escape can serve as a witness of God’s protection; (2) it is better to resist evil than to passively submit to it; (3) Jesus taught that disciples should flee; (4) refusing to flee may be a manifestation of pride; (5) we do not know the appointed time of our death and so cannot presume that it has arrived; (6) God will allow us to be captured if it is His will; (7) to give oneself over to martyrdom is equal to suicide; (8) those who flee also experience difficulties and testing for Christ’s sake. See Pettersen A. “To Flee or Not to Flee”: An Assessment of Athanasius’s *De Fuga Sua* // Sheils W. J. Persecution and Toleration. Studies in Church History, № 21. – No city: Basil Blackwell, 1984. – P. 29-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. From an interview with Rick Raymor, the director of division of Church and Society for the World Evangelical Alliance by Kim Layton on 05.06.1996 (see Shea N. In the Lion’s Den. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1997. – P. 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Barth K. Church Dogmatics / Ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. – Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962. – 4.3.626-627. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
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