

THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE FIRST CENTURY

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Abstract: *The Book of Acts, Paul's letters, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation attest to numerous incidents of persecution, which are attested for most provinces of the Roman empire, triggered by a wide variety of causes and connected with a wide variety of charges against the followers of Jesus. This essay surveys the twenty-seven specific incidents of and general references to persecution of Christians in the NT, with a focus on geographical, chronological, and legal matters.*

Key words: *persecution, mission, hostility, opposition, Jerusalem, Rome, Peter, Paul, Acts, Hebrews, Revelation*

This essay seeks to survey the evidence in the NT for instances of the persecution of Jesus' earliest followers in their historical and chronological contexts without attempting to provide a comprehensive analysis of each incident. The Greek term *diōgmos* that several NT authors use, usually translated as “persecution,”¹ is defined as “a program or process designed to harass and oppress someone.”² The term “persecution” is used here to describe the aggressive harassment and deliberate ill-treatment of the followers of Jesus, ranging from verbal abuse, denunciation before local magistrates, initiating court proceedings to beatings, flogging, banishment from a city, execution, and lynch killings.

I. PERSECUTION IN JUDEA, SYRIA, AND NABATEA (AD 30–38/40)

1. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (I).* Priests in Jerusalem, the captain of the temple, and Sadducees arrested the apostles Peter and John who spoke to a crowd of

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¹ Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17; 10:30; Acts 8:1; 13:50; Rom 8:35; 2 Cor 12:10; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 3:11. The word *diōktēs* means “persecutor” (1 Tim 1:13), the verb *diōkō*, whose basic meaning is “to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective: hasten, run, press on,” is also used with the meaning “to harass someone, especially because of beliefs: persecute” (Matt 5:10, 11, 12, 44; 10:23; Luke 11:49; 21:12; John 5:16; 16:20; Acts 7:52; 9:4, 5; 22:4, 7, 8; 26:11, 14, 15; Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12; 15:9; 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 1:13, 23; 4:29; 5:11; 6:12; Phil 3:6; 2 Tim 3:12; Rev 12:13). Cf. BDAG 253–254.

² BDAG s.v. *διωγμός*. James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 8, defines “persecution” and “unjust suffering” interchangeably to designate “any undeserved penalty or punishment—whether real, imagined, anticipated, or exaggerated.” Some of the material in this essay is adapted from Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Persecution in the Early Christian Mission according to the Book of Acts,” in *Rejection: God's Refugees in Biblical and Contemporary Perspective* (ed. S. E. Porter; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 141–80.

people in Solomon's Portico (Acts 4:1–22). The two apostles are imprisoned and taken to the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court in Judea, whose members conduct a legal investigation. They order the apostles to stop spreading their message about Jesus, threatening further action if they disobey. Then they release the two apostles. These events probably happened in AD 30, perhaps in mid-April, given that Jesus had been executed by crucifixion on April 8 (Nisan 14).³

2. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (II)*. The high priest (Joseph Caiaphas) and the Sadducees arrested the twelve apostles who were active in Jerusalem, teaching and preaching in Solomon's Portico in the temple (Acts 5:17–41). The apostles spend a night in prison. The next morning they are taken to the Sanhedrin where some intend to have them tried, convicted, and executed. After the intervention of Gamaliel, one of the most renowned Jewish teachers, they decide to limit the punishment to flogging. The Twelve are beaten (with a maximum of forty lashes, according to Deut 25:2–3); the ban on teaching about Jesus is issued again; then the apostles are released. This second persecution event in Jerusalem probably happened soon after the first persecution, presumably also in April, AD 30.

3. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (III)*. Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem who belonged to the synagogues of the Freedmen (Jews from Rome), Cyrenians (Libya), Alexandrians (Egypt), Cilicia (Tarsus), and Asia (Ephesus, Pergamon) accused Stephen, one of the Seven who served the neglected widows in the church and who also preached the gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus, of speaking against the temple and the law (Acts 6:9–12). They arrested Stephen, incited the people of Jerusalem, and initiated legal proceedings before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12–15). The high priest (Joseph Caiaphas) presided over the trial which resulted in Stephen's execution (Acts 7:1, 54, 57–60). This third persecution event in Jerusalem presumably happened sometime in AD 31–32.

4. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (IV)*. Following Stephen's execution, the high priest (Joseph Caiaphas) and the members of the Sanhedrin (cf. 7:1, 54–60) took active measures against the church in Jerusalem. Saul (Paul) was actively involved in this persecution which targeted individual Christians families: he went from house to house, dragging off both men and women and putting them into prison (Acts 8:3).

Luke describes Saul's intentions and actions with the phrase "breathing threats and murder" (Acts 9:1 NRSV).⁴ The "threats" refer to punishments in the synagogues—probably flogging (note the forty lashes minus one, a punishment that Paul later received five times after he had become a Christian believer; 2 Cor 11:24). Paul later reports that he punished believers in Jesus "often in all the synagogues" when he "tried to force them to blaspheme" (Acts 26:11). If the word "blaspheme" is formulated from a Christian point of view, the blasphemies that he wanted to extract through torture from Christians would have involved their renunciation of

³ Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: April 2–10, A.D. 30* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), Chap. 3.7.

⁴ The translation "murderous threats" (NIV) weakens the sense of Luke's description of Paul's intentions.

Jesus, abandoning their faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah, uttering curses against Jesus of Nazareth. About 80 years later, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia and Pontus, described that he tried to force Christians to revile (slander, speak ill of, curse) Jesus Christ.⁵ If the word "blaspheme" reflects Paul's pre-Christian perspective as a persecutor of Jesus' followers, it would describe a scenario in which he tortured Christians with the goal of eliciting a statement that slandered Yahweh, the law, or God's people (e.g. that God forgives sin exclusively through Jesus' death on the cross, or that the law is no longer valid, or that Israel is no longer God's chosen people);⁶ or he sought to elicit a statement about Jesus that would be regarded as blasphemy (e.g. that Jesus sits at God's right hand, sharing his divine dignity). The reference in Acts 9:1 to Saul "breathing murder" is explained by Paul in Acts 26:10: "I put many of these people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them." Saul participated in legal proceedings in which Christians were charged with capital offenses, supporting their execution.

As a result of the persecution, many of the Jerusalem believers were forced to leave the city, fleeing to towns in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1, 4–5) where they were presumably taken in by relatives and friends, or by other followers of Jesus. Some of these Jewish Christian refugees traveled to the Mediterranean coast and headed in a northerly direction, reaching Phoenicia, a region that belonged to the province of Syria (Acts 11:19). Jewish communities are attested in Tyre, Sidon, Ptolemais, Dora, Berytus, and Byblos.⁷ They proclaimed the gospel as they traveled from place to place (Acts 8:4; 11:19). Luke later confirms that there were Christian communities in Ptolemais/Acco (Acts 21:7; 165 km or 100 miles from Jerusalem), Sidon (Acts 27:3; 610 km or 380 miles from Jerusalem), and Tyre (Acts 21:3–4; 645 km or 400 miles from Jerusalem). Some of the Jerusalem believers settled in Antioch (on the Orontes river), the capital of the province of Syria (Acts 11:19–20) where many Jews and pagans came to faith in Jesus Messiah (Acts 11:21). Since some of the Jerusalem Christians originally came from Cyprus (Acts 11:20), it is not surprising to hear that some of the Christian refugees went to this island in the eastern Mediterranean (Acts 11:19), embarking at Caesarea (340 km or 210 miles to

⁵ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.5: "Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods in the usual formula, reciting the words after me, those who offered incense and wine before your image, which I had given orders to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities—all such I considered should be discharged, especially as they cursed the name of Christ (*mal-edicerent Christo*), which, it is said, those who are really Christians cannot be induced to do" (trans. J. B. Firth).

⁶ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.152–153, describes the tortures that the Essenes endured during the war with the Romans: "Racked and twisted, burnt and broken, and made to pass through every instrument of torture, in order to induce them to blaspheme their lawgiver or to eat some forbidden thing, they refused to yield to either demand, nor ever once did they cringe to their persecutors or shed a tear. Smiling in their agonies and mildly deriding their tormentors, they cheerfully resigned their souls, confident that they would receive them back again."

⁷ For these and other cities that the Jerusalem believers could have reached on the Phoenician coast, cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1:774–80.

Paphos), Tyre (300 km or 190 miles to Paphos), or Antioch (200 km or 125 miles). This fourth persecution event presumably happened sometime in AD 31–32.

5. *Persecution in Damascus, Syria (I)*. Saul expanded the persecution of believers in Jesus beyond Jerusalem. He consulted with the high priest (Joseph Caiaphas) and obtained letters requesting the authorities to arrest local followers of Jesus and take them to Jerusalem for trial and punishment (Acts 9:1–2; 22:5). English translations and most commentators assume that the letters which Saul procured from the high priest were written to the synagogues in Damascus,⁸ asking for their cooperation in arresting followers of Jesus. This is historically plausible. It is also possible, however, and more natural, to understand the Greek phrase as indicating first the geographical destination of the letters and then their content: the letters were written “to Damascus,” i.e. to the city magistrates of the city, and they “concerned the synagogues.”⁹ A passage in the Mishnah preserves a report about Gamaliel, Saul’s rabbinic teacher, who went to Damascus “to ask for permission from the government in Syria;”¹⁰ the permission evidently concerned one of the Jewish festivals whose date depended on details of the Jewish calendar which were established by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and whose security depended on the Roman authorities in Damascus. The Mishnah text “reflects a time when Gamaliel was a go-between who negotiated the interests of the temple with the government, demonstrating his role in international Judaism as well as in Jerusalem proper.”¹¹

The Jews of Damascus were aware of Saul’s persecution of the believers in Jerusalem and of his intentions in coming to Damascus (Acts 9:13–14). Either the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem had sent emissaries ahead of Saul informing the synagogues of Damascus of what was about to happen, asking for their cooperation. Or Saul’s travel companions (Acts 9:7–8) moved against Jesus’ followers in the local synagogues or assemblies. Due to Saul’s conversion (Acts 9:17–18), the believers in Jesus who lived in Damascus are no longer under threat of being arrested and put on trial in Jerusalem. But Saul’s plans and his arrival in Damascus spread fear among the Christians in Damascus, which is a form of persecution. These events happened sometime in AD 31–32.

6. *Persecution in Arabia/Nabatea*. Paul reports that the “governor”¹² or representative of king Aretas attempted to arrest him when he was in Damascus (2 Cor

⁸The phrase *epistolai eis Damaskon pros tas synagōgas* is understood in the sense that the second prepositional phrase (*pros tas synagōgas*, “to the synagogues”) is connected with “letters” (*epistolai*), while the first prepositional phrase (*eis Damaskon*, “to Damascus”) is connected with the following noun “synagogues” (*synagōgas*).

⁹The preposition *pros*, with accusative, can mean “with reference to.” Here, the word “letter” is first explained by the immediately following phrase (*eis Damaskon*, “to Damascus”) in terms of their geographical destination, and then by their content (*pros tas synagōgas*, “concerning the synagogues”).

¹⁰*m. Eduyyot* 7:7.

¹¹Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, “Paul and Gamaliel,” in *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (ed. J. Neusner and B. D. Chilton; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 211.

¹²The term *ethnarches* can designate the leader of a particular ethnic community. The reference is not to the Roman governor: Arabia was not (yet) a Roman province but it was ruled by a king (*basileus*), at this time King Aretas IV.

11:32–33)¹³ where he had been preaching the gospel (cf. Gal 1:17 in the context of Gal 1:23). He had ordered his men to guard the city gates so that Saul could be seized when he left the city. King Aretas was Aretas IV Philodemos who ruled from 9 BC to AD 40 in Arabia/Nabatea, the region south of Damascus, with Petra as capital. Herod Antipas who ruled in Galilee as tetrarch during Jesus' ministry had married Aretas's daughter in AD 23 but then divorced her in order to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip.¹⁴ John the Baptist was executed in AD 28 after he had censured Antipas on account of this marriage. The tensions between Aretas IV eventually resulted in a war that started in AD 34 (or 29); Aretas won a military victory, which some Jews interpreted as divine punishment for the execution of John the Baptist by Herod.

The context of Aretas's plan to have Saul arrested is the missionary activity of Saul in Arabia (cf. Saul's missionary work in Syria, Nabatea, Judea, and Cilicia). When Saul was active in Aretas's kingdom, around AD 31/32, the tensions between the king and Herod Antipas were intensifying, and it is understandable that religious activities of a Jewish rabbi who had arrived in the region with letters from the Jewish high priest in Jerusalem were suspicious, especially when they changed the religious affiliation of his subjects. It is plausible to assume that Saul had heard of Aretas's plans to have him eliminated and that he had returned to Damascus which was outside of Aretas's kingdom. As a result, Aretas ordered the representative of the Nabatean colony of merchants in Damascus to arrest Saul. The Nabatean persecution of Saul may be dated to AD 32/33.

7. *Persecution in Damascus, Syria (II)*. Luke reports that the Jews of Damascus conspired to kill Saul, closely watching the city gates "day and night" to catch Saul in the attempt to leave the city (Acts 9:23–24). In the context of Paul's report of Aretas's attempt to arrest him in Damascus (2 Cor 11:32), Luke's description suggests that Jews in Damascus supported the ethnarch of king Aretas whose agents would make the arrest. The arrest would either result in a lynch killing, in a trial in the local courts of Damascus, or in Saul's transfer to Petra, the capital of the Nabatean kingdom, where Aretas could put him on trial in his own jurisdiction. The plot of the Jews of Damascus against Saul may be dated to AD 33/34.

8. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (V)*. When Saul returned to Jerusalem after his missionary work in Damascus and in Arabia, he preached and taught boldly in the city, debating the gospel with the Greek-speaking Jews, with the result that they tried to kill him (Acts 9:28–29). We do not know whether there was an actual attempt on Saul's life or whether there was a plot that was discovered before it could be carried out. The latter may be indicated in Luke's information that "the believers heard of this" (Acts 9:30). According to Acts 22:18, a divine directive also played a role in Saul's departure from Jerusalem. The believers took Saul to Caesarea on the

¹³The escape from Damascus in 2 Cor 11:32–33 corresponds to Acts 9:23–25; the "several days" in Acts 9:19 may refer to the time that Saul stayed in Damascus before he embarked on his first missionary project in the towns of Arabia/Nabatea.

¹⁴Josephus, *Ant.* 18.109–115.

coast and booked him on a ship sailing to Tarsus in Cilicia. This event must have happened around AD 33/34.

9. *Persecution in Antioch, province of Syria.* Luke reports that “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26), the capital of the province of Syria where believers from Jerusalem had first preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and where Barnabas and later Paul were involved in pastoral and missionary ministry (Acts 11:19–26). The fact that the term “Christians” (*Christianoi*) was most plausibly coined by Latin speakers suggests that the followers of Jesus had come to the attention of city magistrates in Antioch, as had happened in Jerusalem in the past and would happen in other cities in the future. While the exact circumstances are unknown, it is plausible to assume that the encounter which required labelling the new Jewish movement and which involved the Roman magistrates was a hostile event. Either Jewish citizens of Antioch brought legal charges before the magistrates of the city (as happened in Thessalonica; cf. Acts 17:5–9) or before the Roman governor of the province (as happened in Corinth; cf. Acts 18:12–14). Or Syrian citizens of Antioch who felt threatened by the missionary work of the Christians brought legal charges before the magistrates of the city (as happened in Philippi; cf. Acts 16:19–39). These events could have taken place in AD 37/38 or, if Paul was active in Antioch at the time, in AD 39/40.

II. PERSECUTION IN ROME AND JUDEA (AD 41)

10. *Persecution in Rome (I).* Tiberius Claudius, who became emperor on January 25, AD 41, was friendly to the Jews, as was his great-uncle Augustus. In the first year of his principate, he issued an edict that instructed the provinces to allow the Jews to “observe the customs of their fathers without let or hindrance” while admonishing the Jews to be tolerant to other people who believe in other gods.¹⁵ The two edicts which he subsequently issued targeting the Jews living in Rome were not the result of an anti-Jewish policy¹⁶ but the reaction to disturbances in the city of Rome caused by the missionary activities of Jewish Christians. The first edict, issued in AD 41, is mentioned by Cassius Dio: in the first year of his principate, Claudius commanded the Jews living in Rome to adhere to their ancestral way of life and to refrain from holding assemblies.¹⁷ Recent analyses conclude that this edict should be understood in the context of unrest in the Jewish community in Rome which is most plausibly related to the missionary activity of Jewish Christians

¹⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 19.290. Cf. Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World: The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius* (TSAJ 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 328–42.

¹⁶ H. Dixon Slingerland, *Claudian Policymaking and the Early Imperial Repression of Judaism at Rome* (SFSHJ 160; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), who (still) assumes an anti-Jewish animus of Claudius, has overlooked Rainer Riesner, *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus. Studien zur Chronologie, Missionsstrategie und Theologie* (WUNT 71; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), 139–80, and does not know Helga Botermann, *Das Judentum des Kaisers Claudius. Römischer Staat und Christiani im 1. Jahrhundert* (Hermes Einzelschriften 71; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996).

¹⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 60.6.6; cf. Louis H. Feldman and Reinhold Meyer, *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans: Primary Readings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 332 (no. 10, 32).

in the capital of the empire which caused quarrels in the local synagogues.¹⁸ As many as twelve synagogues are attested for Rome, serving the spiritual needs of the large Jewish community which may have numbered as many as 50,000 Jews.¹⁹ The “synagogue of the Augustesians” was probably the assembly of former Jewish slaves who belonged to the imperial household; the “synagogue of the Agrippesians” consisted of (former) Jewish slaves and freedmen who belonged to Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus’s son-in-law who was friendly with king Herod I. Claudius’s revocation of the Jews’ exemption from the ban on weekly association meetings for the Jews living in the city of Rome, banning their assemblies altogether, would have impacted the Christian congregations as well, which is the reason why this incident is listed here even though the measure was not specifically directed against the Christians.

Three scenarios, which are not mutually exclusive, may explain the origins of Claudius’s edict that rescinded the right of the Jews to assembly.²⁰

(1) Prominent members of the synagogues complained at the imperial court about the followers of Jesus who spread their message in Rome, perhaps hoping that official charges would get these (Jewish) Christians evicted from the city. The Jews of Corinth who wanted to silence Paul attempted a such a procedure ten years later (Acts 18:13).

(2) Aristocratic women who sympathized with the Jewish faith used their influence to suppress the Jewish Christians who were active in Rome. Such a scenario played out four years later in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50).

(3) Herod Agrippa I, a friend of Claudius who gave him control of Roman Judea in AD 41, used his influence to suppress the followers of Jesus who were active in Rome, knowing that the friendship with the emperor could be easily jeopardized if Jews who worshiped Jesus as Israel’s Messiah assembled in Rome, given that Jesus had been executed ten years earlier by Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect in Judea.

We do not know how long Claudius’s edict of AD 41 prohibiting Jews and thus Jewish followers of Jesus from holding regular assemblies was in effect.

11. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (VI)*. The sixth instance of persecution in Jerusalem was the most consequential one when King Herod Agrippa I (10 BC–AD

¹⁸ Cf. Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 167–79; Botermann, *Judenedikt*, 103–40; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:569, 806–7. Cf. David Alvarez Cineira, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Claudius und die paulinische Mission* (Herders biblische Studien 19; Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 260–90, who is skeptical (pp. 194–216), and Silvia Cappelletti, *The Jewish Community of Rome from the Second Century B.C. to the Third Century C.E.* (JSJSup 113; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 81–89, who does not link the edict of AD 41, which responded to “a problem of public order” (89), with the Christian mission.

¹⁹ Cf. Cappelletti, *Jewish Community*, 86 n. 62. For the synagogues of Rome see Joan G. Westenholz, ed., *The Jewish Presence in Ancient Rome* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 1995), 23–27; Irina A. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its Diaspora Setting* (The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting 5; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 182–85; Peter Richardson, “Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17–29.

²⁰ Botermann, *Judenedikt*, 131–32.

44), the grandson of king Herod (the Great), started to put the apostles on trial on death penalty charges. Agrippa²¹ grew up in Rome where he was friends with Gaius Caligula who, when he became emperor in AD 37, granted him the title *basileus* (king) and gave him the tetrarchy of Philip (Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, Pania, with Caesarea Philippi). In AD 39, Agrippa received the tetrarchy of Antipas (Galilee, Perea); after having played a role in the accession of Claudius to the imperial throne in AD 41, he was given Roman Judea (including Samaria and Idumea), which meant that he ruled the restored kingdom of his grandfather Herod: the senate in Rome conferred on him the title “the Great” which he used in coins that he minted during his short reign (AD 41–44).²²

Agrippa travelled to Jerusalem to assume his rule in the spring of AD 41, offered sacrifices, and quickly replaced the incumbent high priest.²³ Agrippa presented himself to the people as a law-abiding king who loved the Jewish people: he observed the rites of purification, lowered taxes, planned to improve the fortification of Jerusalem by constructing a third wall (stopped by the governor of the province of Syria), and championed the sanctity of the temple.

Luke reports that Agrippa “arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to mistreat them” (Acts 12:1).²⁴ He executed James, the brother of John—James, son of Zebedee²⁵—with the sword, and he arrested Peter, evidently convicted him on a death penalty charge, and set a date for his execution after the Passover (Acts 12:2–4). It is only by a miracle that Peter can escape from prison (Acts 12:6–11).

Since Agrippa had been appointed king of the Jews by imperial edict, he would have tried James in his court of law before he executed him, and he would have put Peter on trial after his arrest before the planned execution. It can be assumed that he involved the Jewish authorities in the legal proceedings against the two leaders of the Jesus movement, and that both religious and political arguments played a role in these trials, as in the legal case against Jesus before the Sanhedrin under the leadership of the high priest Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect. The fact that James was killed with the sword confirms, literally, that king Agrippa had the *ius gladii* (lit. “right of the sword”), i.e. the right to condemn a person to death. This detail does not prove that James was tried and executed for political rather than religious reasons nor that he was not convicted by the Jewish

²¹ Daniel R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea* (TSAJ 23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990); Nikos Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse* (JSPSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 271–304; Julia Wilker, *Für Rom und Jerusalem. Die herodianische Dynastie im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Studien zur Alten Geschichte 5; Frankfurt: Antike, 2007), 146–92.

²² Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Jerusalem/Nyack: Yad ben-Zvi Press/Amphora, 2001), 98–101 (no. 121, 122, 124, 125, 126); David Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins* (5th ed.; New York: Amphora, 2010), 271–72 (no. 1245, 1246, 1248, 1249, 1250).

²³ Josephus, *Ant.* 19.292–298.

²⁴ My translation; NIV has “King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.” The verb *kakoo* means “maltreat” (LSJ), “cause harm, mistreat” (cf. BDAG). The translation of the NRSV (“King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church”) removes the comment on Agrippa’s motive.

²⁵ Cf. Matt 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17; Luke 5:10.

(religious) authorities who would have executed by stoning.²⁶ Our knowledge of criminal law in Judea in the first century is limited; we do not know how criminal law was administered during the brief reign of Agrippa I. There is no reason why the Jewish king could not have executed James by stoning, unless the later rabbinic injunction that murderers and the members of a community who have been seduced to idolatry²⁷ was a traditional practice, which is not impossible. Since Jesus had been accused and convicted as a seducer of the people (Matt 27:63; Luke 23:2, 5, 13),²⁸ the early Christian message that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as Israel's Messiah who has been raised from the dead and who has divine dignity (cf. Acts 2:22–36) and who alone can procure salvation (cf. Acts 4:12) could easily be construed by the Jewish authorities and the new Jewish king from Rome as constituting seduction to idolatrous blasphemy.

Agrippa's motives for his active measures against the apostolic leaders of the Jerusalem church can be described in the following terms.

(1) Luke reports that when Agrippa saw that James's execution "met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also" (Acts 12:3). This suggests that Agrippa sought to curry favor with the Jews, which confirms Josephus's information that Agrippa was eager to demonstrate his devotion to the traditions of Israel which focused on the temple and the law.²⁹

(2) Agrippa would have regarded it as politically wise to show support for the aristocratic Sadducees, especially the high priestly family of Annas (Ananus) who hated Jesus and his followers.³⁰ Caiaphas, a son-in-law of Annas, had convicted Jesus on a death penalty charge and transferred him to Pontius Pilate as a seducer of the people who claimed to be king. Then he repeatedly tried to suppress the proclamation of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.³¹ Later Annas II ordered the execution of James, the brother of Jesus, in AD 62.³²

²⁶ For the former see Wilker, *Herodianische Dynastie*, 166; for the latter see Gerd Theißen, "Die Verfolgung unter Agrippa I. und die Autoritätsstruktur der Jerusalemer Gemeinde. Eine Untersuchung zu Act 12,1–4 und Mk 10,35–45," in *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Gestalt* (FS Jürgen Becker; ed. U. Mell and U. B. Müller; BZNW 100; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 268.

²⁷ *m. Sanh.* 9:1.

²⁸ The relevant Hebrew terms are *mesit* and *maddiakb*. For Israelite, Sadducean, and rabbinic law see, respectively, Deut 13:6–17; 11QTemple LIV, 8–LV, 10; *m. Sanh.* 7:10.

²⁹ Wolf Wirgin, *Herod Agrippa I: King of the Jews* (2 vols.; Leeds University Oriental Society Monograph Series 10; Leeds: Leeds University Oriental Society, 1968), 68–101, claims that Agrippa had aspirations of being acknowledged as a messiah-like ruler. Equally unconvincing is the suggestion of Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 119–24, that Agrippa regarded Peter and James, son of Zebedee (one of the "sons of thunder" [Mark 3:17]), as political troublemakers on account of sympathies with the Zealot movement. More recent scholarship has generally not entertained these suggestions as a serious possibility.

³⁰ Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London/Louisville: SCM/Westminster John Knox, 1997), 244–57; Theißen, "Verfolgung," 278. Hengel dates the Agrippa persecution to AD 43 (Agrippa had appointed Matthias son of Annas to the high priesthood in AD 42, Josephus, *Ant.* 19.313; cf. James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests After the Exile* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 448).

³¹ Mark 14:53–65; John 18:13, 24, 28; Acts 4:5–21; 5:17–18.

³² Josephus, *Ant.* 20.197–203; cf. VanderKam, *High Priests*, 476–82.

(3) Agrippa was very much involved in preserving the sanctity of the temple in Jerusalem which had been under threat when Gaius Caligula ordered in the winter of AD 39 that his statue be erected in the temple; the threat ended when Caligula suddenly died on January 24, AD 41.³³ When Agrippa arrived in Jerusalem in AD 41, he would have been able to quickly gain acceptance as the protector of the temple, which would also explain his persecution of the Christians, some of whom questioned the centrality, or necessity, of the temple and its sacrifices.³⁴ At Jesus' trial, witnesses had claimed that Jesus wanted to destroy the temple.³⁵

(4) Agrippa might have planned to implement the religious policies of the emperor Claudius who had commanded the Jews (and Gentiles) in Alexandria to accept the *status quo*, to be content with their traditional rights, and not to provoke unrest; he threatened that if they acted contrary to his wishes, he would take measures against them and treat them as people who foment a common plague for the whole world.³⁶ The proclamation of Jesus Messiah and the acceptance of Gentiles (such as Cornelius; Acts 10) into the church questioned the *status quo*, which Agrippa wanted to uphold by taking decisive action against the leading proponents of this messianic movement.³⁷

(5) Agrippa would have been aware of Claudius's first edict concerning the Jews (see no. 9). This edict would have provided an impetus to make a move against Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.

The date of his actions against James and Peter are linked by Acts 11:4 with the Passover festival, which in AD 41 fell on April 5.³⁸

III. PERSECUTION IN GALATIA AND ROME (AD 46–49)

12. *Persecution in Pisidian Antioch in Phrygia, province of Galatia.* Luke reports strong opposition to the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch. Some of the Jews in the synagogue contradicted Paul's preaching "and heaped abuse on him" (Acts 13:45); the term *blasphēmō* means here "slander, revile, defame." The defamation may have involved the utterance of blasphemies, probably against Jesus, cursing him on the basis of Deut 21:22–23. When the church grew and when the gospel was preached throughout the entire region, the Jewish leaders of Pisidian Antioch contacted the aristocratic women of the city who were regularly attending the synagogue and who were probably benefactors of the local synagogue (Acts 13:50). These prominent women were the wives of "the leading men of the

³³ Philo, *Legat.* 197–337; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.256–309.

³⁴ See the Stephen episode, Acts 6:8–8:3. See Theißen, "Verfolgung," 278–80.

³⁵ Mark 15:57–58.

³⁶ *P. Lond.* VI 1912 (CPJ II 153); English translation in A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri II: Non-Literary Papyri, Public Documents* (LCL 282; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 78–89.

³⁷ Cf. Theißen, "Verfolgung," 274–75. Riesner, *Chronology*, 122 thinks that Agrippa wanted to impress the Sadducees by taking action against the leaders of the church who were involved in missionary work among Gentiles.

³⁸ Cf. Riesner, *Chronology*, 118–22, for arguments that this persecution began in AD 41, at the latest in AD 42.

city,” i.e. the city magistrates, or they constituted a separate group who opposed the two missionaries. The Jewish leaders wanted to “incite” (*parotrynō*)³⁹ the prominent women and the city magistrates, hoping to provoke a strong emotional reaction against the two missionaries. They succeeded in “stirring up persecution” (*epēgeiran diōgmon*) and eventually “expelled” (*exebalon*) them from the region (Acts 13:50). It is plausible to assume, but not indicated by Luke who does provide a rather detailed report of the various reactions to Paul’s preaching in Antioch, that the city magistrates issued an official edict banning Paul and Barnabas from the city. They left the region, travelling southeast on the Via Sebaste via Neapolis (on lake Karalis) and Pappa (Tiberiopolis) to Iconium. When the missionaries visited the town a few weeks or months later to strengthen the believers and appoint elders (Acts 14:21–22), they would have contravened the magistrates’ edict. These events took place in AD 46.

13. *Persecution in Iconium in Lycaonia, province of Galatia.* During the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, Jewish and Gentile residents, including their “leaders” (*archontes*, the local magistrates), conspire to “mistreat” (*hybrizō*) the missionaries and then “stone” (*lithoboleō*) them (Acts 14:5). Stoning (to death) was an official Jewish punishment, but this cannot be meant since non-Jewish officials were involved. Evidently the missionaries’ opponents wanted to harass them and pelt them with stones in order to “convince” them to stop being active in the city, or in the hope of making them leave the region, reckoning with the possibility that the two men might be seriously injured or even killed. When Paul and Barnabas became aware of these plans they evidently concluded that the collaboration between local Jews and the city officials created a dangerous situation which made it imperative to leave the city in a hurry: they flee to Lystra (Acts 14:6), a city south of Iconium. These events took place in AD 46.

14. *Persecution in Lystra in Lycaonia, province of Galatia.* When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Lystra, Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium arrived in the city and “convinced” (*peithō*) the townspeople—presumably first members of the local Jewish community, then presumably other citizens—that the activities of the two preachers should not be tolerated (Acts 14:19). They “stoned” (*lithazō*) Paul, an incident that Paul refers to in 2 Cor 11:25. Then they drag Paul’s body, who is severely wounded and probably unconscious, through the streets and one of the gates to a place outside the city, thinking that he is dead (Acts 14:19). After Paul was revived, he and Barnabas leave the city on the next day, traveling south and then east to Derbe. These events also happened in AD 46.

15. *Persecution in Rome (II).* In AD 49, the emperor Claudius issued a second edict against the Jews of Rome, ordering them to leave the city of Rome (see no. 9).⁴⁰ Suetonius reports Claudius’s measures against “men of foreign birth” (*peregrinae condicionis homines*) and specifies that “since the Jews constantly made disturb-

³⁹ The verb *parotrynō* is used only here in the NT.

⁴⁰ The date of AD 49 is given by Orosius, on the basis of a passage in Josephus which is now lost; cf. Orosius, *Adversus paganos* 7.6.15.

ances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome” (*Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulsi*).⁴¹ The edict was a reaction to severe disturbances which Claudius decided could be stopped only if he ordered the expulsion of the Jews living in Rome. Most scholars interpret the term *Chrestus* who is named as the instigator of the disturbances as a reference to Jesus Christ.⁴² The alternative—an unknown Jewish troublemaker with the name Chrestus⁴³ was active in Rome around AD 49—is less plausible. Suetonius evidently believed that this “Chrestus” was present in Rome, while in reality the edict reacted to disturbances provoked by the missionary outreach of Jewish followers of Jesus who preached that Jesus was the Messiah (Greek *Christos*). The edict of expulsion was directed at all the Jews living in Rome, not only the Christians. Luke’s comment in Acts 18:2 that the Jewish couple Aquila and Priscilla “had recently come from Italy . . . because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome” demonstrates the impact of the edict on the Jewish Christians in Rome.

The letter to the Hebrews reflects the reality of past, present, and imminent persecution. While some have argued with some plausibility that the text was written for a Jewish Christian group in the city of Rome,⁴⁴ others argue that the author seems to address the entire church, without distinguishing between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians.⁴⁵ It cannot be determined when the letter was written, but a date before the Neronian persecution of Christians after the fire of AD 64 in which Christians were killed (see below, no. 25) is plausible: it seems that none of the members of the church had suffered martyrdom (Heb 12:4). The details given by the author allow for the possibility that the persecution took place in connection with Claudius’s edict of AD 49.⁴⁶ He reminds the believers that they had “endured in a great conflict full of suffering” (Heb 10:32) which is specified in the next sentences: some of them had been “made a public spectacle through denunciations and afflictions,” some had been prisoners, and some had suffered the “seizure” of

⁴¹ Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.3–4.

⁴² Cf. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations* (orig. 1976; repr., SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 210–16; Botermann, *Judenedikt*, 50–136; recently Cappelletti, *Jewish Community*, 77–78.

⁴³ The name Chrestus is attested among manumitted slaves (freedmen), e.g. CIL VI 24944. Cf. Botermann, *Judenedikt*, 59.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hans-Friedrich Weiß, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 76; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 28–29; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 76–77. Some see the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem as recipients, e.g. Paul W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 366.

⁴⁵ Erich Gräber, *An die Hebräer* (3 vols.; EKK XVII; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1990–1997), 1:24.

⁴⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 52, finds the connection with Claudius’s edict more plausible than a connection with the Neronian persecution. Other suggestions are discussed by Gräber, *Hebräer*, 3:62–63, who regards all suggestions for a correlation with specific historical events as “vergebliche Forschermüh” (“futile scholars’ toil”).

their possessions (Heb 10:33–34; cf. 13:3).⁴⁷ Denunciations (*oneidismoi*) by people who regarded the followers of Jesus as dangerous and who reported them to the authorities prompted four types of punishments, presumably after court cases in which Christians were found guilty.⁴⁸ First, they were made a public spectacle in the theater (*theatrizō*) where a hostile crowd hurled insults at them at the commencement of their imprisonment. Second, they suffered physical punishments (*thlipsis*), such as public flogging and beatings. Third, they were incarcerated (*desmioi*), awaiting trial and sentencing. Fourth, they suffered the confiscation of their possessions (*harpagē tōn hyparchontōn*) which, as the context indicates, was an official action ordered by the courts.⁴⁹ The most plausible charge on which the Christians were convicted was the charge of *maiestas* (“treason”) on account of their weekly meetings, violating Augustus’s legislation on associations (from which Jews were explicitly exempt).⁵⁰ A fifth punishment may be hinted at in Heb 13:12–14 where the believers are admonished to accept suffering “outside the city gate . . . outside the camp,” expressions that Bruce Winter interprets as referring to the punishment of exile in a distant and lonely place, a punishment that involved the loss of citizenship and all property.⁵¹ Court cases in which Christians of Rome were sentenced to “exile” (*exsul*) could well have taken place in connection with Claudius’s expulsion of the Jews from Rome in AD 49.

IV. PERSECUTION IN MACEDONIA, ACHAIA, AND ASIA, AD 49–57

16. *Persecution in Philippi, province of Macedonia.* In Philippi, a “most honored city” in the province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12)—the first city in Europe in which Paul and his team of coworkers preached the gospel—a fortune-telling slave girl was liberated from the spirit who had been speaking through her (Acts 15:18). Since the girl was no longer able to work as a medium of the spirit world, her owners seized Paul and Silas and accused them in the forum of the city before the magistrates of causing a disturbance in the city and of introducing new and unlawful customs (Acts 16:19–21). These charges were serious. The punishment could range, depending on the specific charges, from eviction, to loss of citizenship, forfeiture of private assets, and even the death penalty. The citizens of Philippi supported the accusations of the slave girl’s owners. The magistrates ordered the lictors (bailiffs) to strip Paul and Silas and beat them with rods, a punishment that usually accompanied other penalties (Acts 16:22–23). The flogging indicates that the magistrates treated Paul and Silas as low-status individuals who could be assumed of being

⁴⁷ Translation from Koester, *Hebrews*, 458. Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 270, interprets *oneidismoi* in terms of “verbal abuses”; thus most English translations.

⁴⁸ For the following see Winter, *Divine Honours*, 268–72.

⁴⁹ Winter, *Divine Honours*, 273; cf. Weiß, *Hebräer*, 546. Differently Gräber, *Hebräer*, 3:67, and Koester, *Hebrews*, 460, who think that the seizures were not fully legal but tolerated by the authorities.

⁵⁰ Cf. Olivia F. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (London/Baltimore: Duckworth/Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 80.

⁵¹ Winter, *Divine Honours*, 278–85.

guilty of criminal behavior by accusation alone. They used their *coercitio* powers which included the authority to take measures in order to restore public order when they ordered the imprisonment of the two preachers in a maximum-security cell, with their feet secured in stocks, a short-term punishment of misbehaving individuals (Acts 16:23–24). These events date to August/October AD 49.

17. *Persecution in Thessalonica, province of Macedonia.* Some of the Jews in Thessalonica responded to Paul's preaching by recruiting "bad characters" (NIV), organizing a crowd who started a riot, probably a reference to an unofficial demonstration that got out of hand; they looked for Paul and Silas with the intention to drag them before the assembly of the city, evidently hoping that the citizens would indict and sanction the visiting teachers (Acts 17:5). After they failed to locate Paul and Silas, they took Jason, presumably Paul's host, before the *politarchs*, the senior magistrates of the city who were responsible for convening the assembly of the people (*ekklesia*) as well as the city council (*boule*) and who had judicial authority. The citizens whom the Jewish agitators had managed to organize accuse Paul and Silas of two offenses: first, they are people who upset the stability in other regions of the empire and who have now come to Thessalonica where they are also upsetting the stability of peace and order; second, they violate the decrees of the emperor by advocating loyalty to a certain Jesus rather than to the emperor in Rome (Acts 17:6–7). These charges, which amounted to treason, caused the magistrates to be agitated as they could be accused of tolerating the promulgation of people who proclaim a pretender king and advocate violating the oath of allegiance to the emperor. Since they could not interrogate and sanction the visiting teachers, they took bail from Jason and other believers whom they evidently force to vouch either for the good behavior of Paul and Silas or for their departure from the city (Acts 17:9). The situation is deemed so dangerous that the Thessalonian believers took action the same day: that very night they take Paul and Silas to Berea (Acts 17:10). These events date to October or November AD 49.

18. *Persecution in Berea, province of Macedonia.* In Berea, a city west of Thessalonica, a large number of Jews and Gentiles come to faith in Jesus. When news of Paul's activities reaches the Jewish community in Thessalonica, they sent representatives to Berea who succeeded in inciting the local citizens. While Silas and Timothy were able to stay, the situation became too dangerous for Paul who is taken by Berean believers to the coast and from there to Athens (Acts 17:11–15). These events probably date to December AD 49 or January AD 50.

19. *Persecution in Corinth, province of Achaia (I).* After missionary work in Athens (Acts 17:16–34), for which no opposition or persecution is reported, Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia, probably beginning in February or March AD 50. While some Corinthian Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah, others opposed Paul and slandered him, perhaps asserting that he blasphemes God since he teaches that the crucified Jesus is God's Messiah rather than a man cursed by God (cf. Deut 21:22–23). As a result of the opposition, Paul abandoned his teaching activity in the synagogue (Acts 18:6–7). The success of Paul's preaching which led to the conversion of numerous Jews and Gentiles caused the opposition to continue, with Paul evidently considering leaving the city, a plan that is

abandoned only after God assured Paul in a vision that he will not be harmed (Acts 18:9–10).

The continuing opposition to Paul reached a climax when the Jews of Corinth who had not come to faith in Jesus “made a united attack” by seizing Paul and taking him to the judicial bench (*bēma*), a platform in the center of the central terrace in the forum of the city (Acts 18:12).⁵² This means that the Jewish leaders of Corinth initiated trial proceedings by forcing Paul to appear before the governor of the province of Achaia, hoping that he would agree to judicial proceedings in which they hoped to convince the court to issue a guilty verdict. This was the first time Paul was forced to appear before a representative of the Roman empire. Gallio, whose full name was Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus, was the older brother of Seneca, the Stoic philosopher who was the teacher and confidante of Nero (who became emperor a few years later in AD 54). He was a member of the senate in Rome and appointed proconsul of the province of Achaia in AD 51 by the emperor Claudius; his proconsulship lasted from July 1, AD 51 to June 30, AD 52. In a letter written to the city of Delphi, Claudius gives him the official accolade “my friend and proconsul;”⁵³ the designation “my friend” is “virtually a title bestowing on its holder high social cachet ... and the expectation of being asked from time to time to advise the Emperor as a member of his *consilium*.”⁵⁴ Paul is accused of “persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law” (Acts 18:13). The term “law” (*nomos*) refers here surely not to the Jewish (Mosaic) Law but to Roman law since it is only in cases in which Roman law was violated that the proconsul of a Roman province could be expected to intervene. Luke does not specify the details of the accusation. Perhaps the charges resembled those advanced by the Jews in Thessalonica who had accused Paul of proclaiming Jesus as king, implying that Paul wanted to instigate a rebellion against the emperor and against Roman rule in the provinces. Or, the Corinthian Jews appealed to an earlier edict of Claudius which had stipulated that the Jews should be allowed to practice their customs without interference, arguing that Paul disturbed law and order in the city of Corinth with his new religious teaching before Jews and Gentiles.⁵⁵ Or, they accused Paul of introducing a new religious cult whose weekly meetings were not exempt—as were the meetings of the Jewish population in their synagogues—from the imperial ban on weekly meetings of associations and clubs.⁵⁶

⁵² Cf. Mary E. H. Walbank, “The Foundation and Planning of Early Roman Corinth,” *JRA* 10 (1997): 121–22.

⁵³ The letter is preserved in an inscription found in Delphi; cf. André Plassart, *Inscriptions de la terrasse du temple et de la région nord du sanctuaire, Nos. 276 à 350. Les inscriptions du Temple du IV^e siècle* (Fouilles de Delphes III: Épigraphie 4; Paris: Boccard, 1970), 26–32 (no. 286); for an English translation see Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983), 173–76.

⁵⁴ Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (orig. 1984; repr. New York: Routledge, 2000), 71.

⁵⁵ Cf. Adrian Nicolas Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (The Sarum Lectures 1960–1961; orig. 1963; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 99–107.

⁵⁶ Cf. Wendy Cotter, “The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200 CE,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 74–89; Bruce W. Winter, “Gallio’s Ruling on the Legal Status of Early Christianity (Acts 18:14–15),” *TynBul* 50 (1999): 217–18.

Gallio pronounced a ruling on the case before Paul is able to explain his activities (Acts 18:14–15). He dismissed the case against Paul, rejecting the legal merits of the charges: the accusations are neither a matter of “criminal behavior” nor a serious case of “deception.”⁵⁷ Rather, they concern controversial questions about (1) “teaching” (*logos*); (2) “names” (*onomata*), i.e. not actions but persons (Moses or Jesus) or terms (such as savior, righteousness, resurrection); and (3) the law of the Jews (*nomos ho kath’ hymas*), for whose interpretation and enforcement the proconsul is not responsible—all matters which the Jewish community needs to resolve internally. Thus the legal prosecution of Paul and the newly established community of followers of Jesus collapses. Instead of Paul suffering harm, the Roman patrons and their clients who observed the Jews’ initiative in the forum beat up Sosthenes, the president of the synagogue.⁵⁸ These events took place in AD 50–51, the Gallio incident probably in July/August AD 51.

20. *Persecution in Ephesus, province of Asia.* When Paul was active in Ephesus,⁵⁹ Demetrius, the leader of the guild of the silversmiths, incited the citizens to defend the preeminence of the goddess Artemis Ephesia against the growing Christian movement (Acts 19:23–28). Demetrius warns of the damage Paul’s activities might inflict on the temple of Artemis and on the city and indeed the entire province. Rather than taking legal action against Paul before the city magistrates and the local courts or before the proconsul of the province, Demetrius galvanized the population: people rushed into the theater for an impromptu popular assembly, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s travel companions, shouting for hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Evidently Gaius and Aristarchus were denounced before the crowd in the theater which seated 24,000 people, the public shame (and possible physical harm) designed to suppress the influence of the new group of the followers of Jesus. The situation was so dangerous that Paul, who intended to speak to the assembly, is prevented by local believers and local officials from going into the theater (Acts 19:29–34). Gaius and Aristarchus seem to have been set free after the *grammateus* (city clerk) managed to quiet the crowd, warning of the detrimental consequences of mob violence, suggesting that they can file legal charges against Paul and his associates (Acts 19:35–41). Paul’s departure from Ephesus, which evidently took place immediately after the end of the riot (Acts 19:42), suggests that he decided to leave promptly in order to preempt a legal case before the local courts or the proconsul, implementing the planned departure for Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 19:21) earlier than anticipated. These events probably took place in June/July AD 55.

⁵⁷ NIV translates in Acts 18:14 “some misdemeanor or serious crime,” which misses the meaning of the Greek terms *adikema* and *rhadiourgema*.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bruce W. Winter, “Rehabilitating Gallio and his Judgement in Acts 18:14–15,” *TynBul* 57 (2006): 305.

⁵⁹ The opposition by Jews in the synagogue of Ephesus which prompted Paul to move his activities to the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) is not an instance of persecution—it was Paul’s decision to leave the synagogue where he was no longer welcome and to move to a neutral venue in which he would not constantly be involved in theological controversies.

Some scholars interpret Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 15:32 that he "fought wild beasts in Ephesus" literally: Paul was put on trial, convicted of a crime, and sentenced *ad bestias*, i.e. to fight wild animals in the arena—saved, perhaps, at the last minute when he was able to point to the fact that he was a Roman citizen.⁶⁰ Other scholars interpret the "wild beasts" as a metaphorical reference to bloodthirsty opponents who were eager to tear him to pieces, perhaps in the context of a violent mob.⁶¹ Others interpret more generally: Paul survived a dangerous situation in Ephesus in which he could have died.⁶² This interpretation has been connected with Rom 16:3–4 where Paul tells the Christians in Rome that Aquila and Priska, his coworkers in Ephesus, risked their lives for Paul; however, this incident could have taken place in Corinth. Another interpretation interprets in terms of a dangerous illness that Paul had to fight off when working in Ephesus.⁶³ Others interpret the reference to a fight against wild beasts in the context of the Stoic metaphor of the fight against the passions, particularly sexual desires, as a fight against wild beasts.⁶⁴ Since these interpretations are all possible, even if not equally plausible,⁶⁵ it is advisable to refrain from regarding 1 Cor 15:32 as evidence for persecution. The same is true for the suggestion that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus and that it was this imprisonment during which he wrote the so-called prison epistles (Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), since the arguments for these letters being written during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea or, more plausibly, in Rome, are at least as, if not more, convincing than the arguments for an imprisonment in Ephesus, which is not mentioned in Acts.

21. *Persecution in Corinth, province of Achaia (II)*. Jews in Corinth made plans to harm Paul, perhaps during the sea voyage from Corinth to Syria and Jerusalem for the Passover Festival (Acts 20:3). The discovery of the plot forced Paul to abandon his plans for sailing to Syria, prompting him to take the land route north to Macedonia and across to Asia Minor, embarking on a ship in Assos (Acts 20:14). These events date to April AD 57.

V. PERSECUTION IN JUDEA, ASIA MINOR, AND ROME (AD 57–67)

22. *Persecution in Jerusalem, Judea (VII)*. Upon Paul's return to Jerusalem, James, Jesus' brother and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, asked him to demonstrate that the rumors that he teaches the Jewish believers to neglect the Mosaic law are

⁶⁰ Thus recently Dieter Zeller, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 501–502.

⁶¹ Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 721.

⁶² Cf. Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (4 vols.; EKK 7; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1991–2001), 4:244.

⁶³ Cf. Richard E. Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (BZNW 80; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 282, with reference to Artemidorus, *Oneiro.* 2.12.

⁶⁴ Lucian, *Lexiphanes* 19; Dio Chryostom, *Orat.* 1.84; 5.22–23; cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, "The Beasts at Ephesus," *JBL* 87 (1968): 71–80; Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 102–103.

⁶⁵ Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (3rd ed.; Historisch-Theologische Auslegung; Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2014), 946–48.

false. Paul agrees to undergo purification rites in the Temple and to pay for the sacrifices required for the purification of several Jewish believers who are under a vow (Acts 21:20–26). When Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in one of the inner courts of the temple, they stirred up the throngs of people present in the court who seized Paul, thinking that he had profaned the temple by bringing Trophimus, a Gentile Christian from Ephesus, into the inner court (Acts 21:27–29). The shouts on the temple mount threw the entire city into turmoil, so much so that people rushed into the temple where they seized Paul and dragged him from the inner courts into the outer court, shutting the gates (Acts 21:30). It was probably the captain of the temple (cf. Acts 4:1) who ordered that the gates of the inner enclosure and of the court of women be shut. Then they tried to kill Paul on the spot, in the outer court (later called Court of the Gentiles), which was prevented when the commander of the Roman cohort stationed in the Antonia fortress on the north side of the outer court, alerted to the disturbances, stopped the lynching that was in progress (Acts 21:30–33). Once Paul had been taken into the barracks (Acts 21:34; 22:24), the commander sought to extract a confession by torture, which was prevented when Paul mentioned that he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:24–29). After a hearing in the Sanhedrin, in which the commander sought to establish the charges against Paul, proved to be inconclusive (Acts 22:30–23:10), and after a plot of Jerusalem Jews to kill Paul was uncovered (Acts 23:12–22), Paul was transferred as a prisoner to Caesarea. These events took place in May AD 57.

23. *Persecution in Caesarea, Judea.* The high priest Ananias and members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 24:1, 5–6) traveled to Caesarea, the seat of the Roman administration of Judea, initiating legal proceedings against Paul before Felix, the Roman prefect of Judea, evidently with the goal of obtaining a death sentence (Acts 24:1–9). Paul defended himself effectively: the Jewish leaders cannot prove their charge of *sedition* (threatening the peace of society) and of leading a party that pledges devotion to a man executed by the Roman authorities as a teacher who seduced the people.⁶⁶ Still, Felix refused to release him, even though he was willing to listen to Paul explain his teaching. Paul remains in custody in the residence of the Roman prefect, awaiting the resolution of his case. Two years later, when Porcius Festus arrived in the province as the new prefect, Paul's opponents plan an ambush to kill Paul during a requested transfer of the case to Jerusalem (Acts 25:2–3). Since Festus was inclined to grant the request of the Jewish leaders, Paul feared that he would not get a fair hearing and consequently appealed to be tried by the emperor, a right that he had as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:1–12). Paul is transferred from Caesarea to Rome as a prisoner in AD 59–60, two years after his arrest in Jerusalem.

24. *Persecution in Rome (III).* Paul is a prisoner in Rome at least for the two years from AD 60–62. If the Jewish leaders who had initiated legal proceedings against Paul in Judea did not show up in Rome, together with the requisite witnesses who could prove that Paul was guilty of the charges brought against him before

⁶⁶ Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (ZECNT 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 954–55.

the two prefects Felix and Festus, the case against Paul might have been dismissed—or not, if Nero, who was emperor since AD 54, regarded Paul as a threat.

If the letter to the Hebrews is connected with the city of Rome (see no. 15), the threat of a new, possibly more severe persecution could imply imminent events not long before AD 64 when, after the fire which raged in Rome from July 19–28, Nero persecuted and killed many Christians whom he used as scapegoats for the fire. Tacitus reports that Nero

placed the guilt on others on whom he inflicted the most extraordinary punishments. These were people hated for their shameful vices whom the common people called Christians. ... And so, at first, the people who confessed were arrested. Subsequently, vast numbers were convicted as a result of their disclosures, not so much on account of arson as for their hatred of mankind. Insult accompanied their end: they were wrapped in the skins of wild animals and perished by being torn to pieces by dogs; or they were nailed to crosses and, when daylight had gone, burned to provide lighting at night. Nero had offered his gardens as a venue for the spectacle, and he also organized circus entertainments during which he mixed with the crowd in his charioteer's outfit or standing in his chariot. As a result, even though they were guilty and deserved the most exemplary punishment, pity for them arose on account of the impression that they were destroyed not for the public good but to gratify one man's cruelty.⁶⁷

25. *Persecution in the provinces of Pontus-Bithynia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia.* Whether or not Peter preached the gospel and established churches in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor north of the Taurus mountains,⁶⁸ the addressees of 1 Peter are located in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1). This list can be understood as referring to “the totality of Christian communities residing in the whole of Roman Asia Minor north and west of the Taurus,”⁶⁹ or to the region north of the Taurus Mountains “perhaps deliberately excluding such Pauline missionary areas in Asia Minor as Pamphylia (Acts 13:13), Pisidia (13:14; 14:1), Lycaonia (14:6), Cilicia (15:41), and Phrygia (16:6).”⁷⁰ The fact that Pontus is mentioned separately from Bithynia, despite the fact that the two regions formed one province, might be an indication that the areas of Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia are in view which are adjacent to Pontus-Bithynia. Larger cities in Pontus-Bithynia (from east to west): Trapezus, Cerasus, Neocaesarea, Amisus, Sinope, Nicomedia, and Nicaea; in northern Galatia: Comana, Amaseia, Neoclaudiopolis, Pompeiopolis, Caesareis (in the region Pontus Galaticus), as well as Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus; in Cappadocia: Sebasteia, Caesareia, Tyana, Nazianzus, Colonia Archelais; in northern Asia: Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Smyrna, Pergamon.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Ann.* 15.44. Translation taken from Eckhard J. Schnabel, “The Roman Trial before Pontius Pilatus,” in D. W. Chapman and E. J. Schnabel, *The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus: Texts and Commentary* (WUNT 344; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 153–298, 192–93.

⁶⁸ This is assumed, among others, by Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2:3.

⁶⁹ John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 86.

⁷⁰ Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 85.

⁷¹ Cf. Maps 3 and 6 in Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:66, 156; also Elliott, *1 Peter*, 85.

The believers to whom Peter writes his letter face trials (1 Pet 1:5–6) and unjust suffering (1 Pet 3:9, 14)—mostly verbal abuse, as is indicated by the terms “slander” (*katalalō*; 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16), “disparage” (*epērazeō*; 1 Pet 3:16), “malign” (*blasphēmō*; 1 Pet 4:4), and “reproach” (*oneidizō*; 1 Pet 4:14).⁷² The fact that the believers have reason to be afraid (1 Pet 3:6) suggests that the verbal abuse at least implied more intimidating measures against the believers, if it did not indeed go hand in hand with denunciations before local magistrates. While the reference to the believers’ readiness to give a “defense” (*apologia*) of their faith (1 Pet 3:15) may describe informal demands by unbelievers that Christians account for their beliefs and actions, a reference to the believers’ legal response when hailed into a local court of law cannot be ruled out.⁷³ Given the experiences of Paul in Asia Minor, it would be surprising if the believers in the northern provinces would never have been denounced to the local authorities. The statement in 1 Pet 4:16 (“If you suffer as a Christian”) supports this: the term *christianos* implies contacts between the followers of Jesus and Latin speakers who used this term to ridicule the believers in Jesus Messiah and who would consist of the local elites in these provinces (see no. 11).

26. *Persecution in Rome (IV)*. The apostles Paul and Peter were martyred in the Neronian persecution, according to early tradition.⁷⁴ Eusebius, who dates the death of Paul and Peter to Nero’s thirteenth year (October 13, AD 66–October 12, AD 67),⁷⁵ writes: “It is recorded that in Nero’s reign Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified and the record is confirmed by the fact that the cemeteries there are still called by the names of Peter and Paul.”⁷⁶ The presentation of the deaths of Paul and Peter in the second century *Acts of Paul* and *Acts of Peter* implies that they died at different times.⁷⁷

VI. PERSECUTION IN ASIA MINOR (CA. AD 68–95)

27. *Persecution in the churches of the province of Asia*. Believers in the church in Philadelphia were pressured by local Jews to deny the name of Jesus Messiah (Rev 3:8–9). In Smyrna, members of the synagogue denounced followers of Jesus to the local authorities, perhaps alleging that their professed loyalty to Jesus as sovereign

⁷² Cf. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 100.

⁷³ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 233; differently Elliott, *1 Peter*, 627–28, who argues against a possible legal reference of the term *apologia*.

⁷⁴ The earliest reference is *1 Clement* 5, which mentions neither the circumstances nor the date of their death.

⁷⁵ Alfred Schöne, *Eusebi Chroniconum, Armeniam versionem latine factam ad libros manuscriptos recensuit H. Peterman* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1975–1876), 2:156–157 (Armenian version); Jerome’s Latin translation dates their death to Nero’s fourteenth year, i.e. AD 67/68.

⁷⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 2.25; trans. Williamson.

⁷⁷ *Acts Paul* 11; *Acts Pet.* 30–41; see also *Ascen. Isa.* 4.2–3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 27.6.6. As regards Nero’s personal involvement, one needs to keep in mind that Nero was in Greece from autumn AD 66 to the end of AD 67 or the beginning of 68; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 371, with reference to Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres pastorales* (4th ed.; ÉBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 146.

Lord implied disloyalty to the emperor.⁷⁸ Such denunciations had resulted in, or might soon lead to, the imprisonment of believers (Rev 2:9–10). At Pergamon, Antipas, a faithful witness to the gospel, had been put to death (Rev 2:13). The statement that Antipas was killed “in your city” leaves open whether Antipas was a member of the church in Pergamon or whether he was a member of the church in another city in the region whose legal case was heard in Pergamon, which was one of the judicial centers of the province.⁷⁹ In the late second or early third century Christians from Thyatira were martyred in Pergamon.⁸⁰

Further passages in Revelation also provide evidence for persecution. John himself had suffered on account of his faith in Jesus: he had evidently been denounced to the authorities, tried in a local court and sentenced to “relegation to an island” (*relegatio ad insulam*), which did not normally involve loss of Roman citizenship or property, or perhaps to “deportation to an island” (*deportatio ad insulam*), which was permanent and involved loss of all rights and property—specifically to the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). He was not executed, as was Antipas, perhaps because he belonged to a higher social class,⁸¹ or because his prophecies were regarded not as treason but as pernicious superstition which was punished with a more lenient sentence.⁸² John’s readers know believers “who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Rev 6:9); who were beheaded (Rev 20:4); who had died as martyrs as a result of their testimony (Rev 12:11; cf. 11:7–8; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24) and who thus “came out of the great tribulation” (Rev 7:14). The situation that John’s prophecy for the seven churches implies can be dated from the early AD 70s to the late AD 90s,⁸³ while an earlier date during the reign of Nero (AD 54–68) or shortly thereafter continues to be advocated.⁸⁴

VII. CONCLUSION

The survey of all instances of the persecution of the earliest followers of Jesus demonstrates the pervasiveness of verbal and physical attacks against Christians. The only provinces of the Roman empire for which no persecution is reported are

⁷⁸ Cf. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation* (AB 38A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 97, 280.

⁷⁹ Cf. Koester, *Revelation*, 287; according to the much later tradition related in *Acta Sanctorum* 2.3–5, Antipas was interrogated by the proconsul and, after sentencing, placed in a hollow bronze bull in which he was roasted to death over a fire.

⁸⁰ *The Acts of Carpus, Papyllus, and Agathonice* 27, 44–47; cf. Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 27, 29.

⁸¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52; Dallas: Word, 1997–98), 1:79–80.

⁸² Cf. Koester, *Revelation*, 243, with reference to Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 102.

⁸³ Thus Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lxv, lxx.

⁸⁴ The title of two Syriac versions of Revelation sets John’s exile to Patmos during the reign of Nero, a view shared by Theophylact in his commentary on Revelation written in the 11th century; cf. Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lx; some scholars continue to hold the view that Revelation was written in the aftermath of Nero’s reign and before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; cf. Thomas B. Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse to John,” *Bib* 84 (2003): 252–58. Epiphanius, who wrote in the 4th century, set the exile and return of John during the principate of Claudius (AD 41–54; *Haer.* 51.13.33).

Cyprus, Cilicia, and Pamphylia (as well as Spain and Egypt, provinces for which we have no explicit record of missionary activity in the first century). It is no surprise, given Luke's focus in the first part of the Book of Acts on the mission of the Twelve in Judea, that the largest of incidences is reported for Jerusalem (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 22); Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, the administrative center of Roman Judea (no. 23), needs to be mentioned here as well. While Luke mentions only one instance of persecution for the city of Rome (no. 24), other sources point to three further events in Rome (nos. 9, 15, 25). Three instances of persecution are reported for the province of Syria (Damascus, nos. 5, 7; Antioch, no. 11), the province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, nos. 12–14), and for the province of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea; no. 16, 17, 18). Two instances of persecution are reported for the province of Achaia (Corinth, no. 19, 21), and one for Arabia (no. 6). An undetermined number of events are reported for the province of Asia (Ephesus, no. 20; Asia, no. 26, 27; cf. no. 22) and for the provinces of Pontus-Bithynia, Galatia, and Cappadocia (no. 27). Luke's reports about entire local congregations being persecuted—in Jerusalem (no. 4), Damascus (no. 5), Rome (no. 15), Ephesus (no. 20)—demonstrate that on some occasions few if any of the local Christians escaped the hostility of opponents; this is confirmed by the evidence in 1 Peter (no. 25), Hebrews (no. 15, 24), and Revelation (no. 27). Luke mentions seven individuals who are persecuted—Peter, John, Stephen, James, Paul, Barnabas, Silas—some of them multiple times, in particular Paul. Other sources mention only one name (John; no. 27).

A significant factor seems to have been Claudius's second edict of AD 41 which rescinded the exemption from the prohibition of weekly meetings for the Jews living in Rome, banning all assemblies (no. 10). It is probably not a coincidence that Herod Agrippa I, who arrived in Jerusalem in AD 41, moved against the Christians in Jerusalem, executing James and planning the execution of Peter (no. 11). A second significant factor can be seen in Claudius's second edict of AD 49 which evicted the Jewish population from the city of Rome on account of Christian missionary activities (no. 15): since the occasion of this edict would have quickly become known in the provincial administrations, it might explain the hostile measures against Christians in the cities of the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia (nos. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21).

Luke's reports of incidents of persecution are neither stereotypical, nor artificially construed, nor focused on a single theme.⁸⁵ For the Jerusalem incidents, Luke mentions twelve initiators of persecution: the priests (Acts 4:1), the captain of the Temple (4:1), the Sadducees (4:1; 5:17), the leaders (*hoi archontes*; 4:5), the elders (*hoi presbyteroi*; 4:5), the Jewish people (6:12), the members of the Sanhedrin (6:12), the scribes (6:12), the high priest (5:17; 7:1; 9:1; 24:1), the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem (cf. 6:9–11 with 9:29), Saul (8:1, 3; 9:1–2), and Jewish pilgrims from the province of Asia (21:27). In incidents outside of Jerusalem, Luke mentions fifteen instigators of persecution: Greek-speaking Jews in Damascus (9:29–30), Herod Agrippa

⁸⁵ Pace Kelhoffer, *Persecution*, 286, 360–61, passim, and others.

I (12:1–19), Jews of Pisidian Antioch (13:50; 14:19), Gentile women of high social standing (13:50), the “leading men of the city” in Pisidian Antioch (13:50), Jews of Iconium (14:5, 19), the non-Jewish citizens of Iconium (14:5), the city officials in Iconium (14:5), the owners of a fortune-telling slave girl in Philippi (16:19), the city officials of Philippi (16:19), Jews of Thessalonica (17:5), bad characters in the market of Thessalonica (17:5), the city officials of Thessalonica (17:6, 8), Jews of Corinth (18:12; 20:3), and Demetrius, the leader of the guild of silversmiths in Ephesus (19:25). Since nearly a third of the instigators of persecution in Acts are non-Jewish, it is problematic to assert that the depicted persecutors in Acts “are usually Jewish.”⁸⁶ Charges against Christians include unauthorized teaching (Acts 4:2), proclamation of the risen Jesus (4:2), teaching in the name of Jesus (4:2), blasphemy (7:57), profanation of the temple in Jerusalem (21:27–30; 24:6), attacking the patron deity of the city (19:27), introduction of new customs which are unlawful for Roman citizens (16:21; 18:13; 19:26), sedition (16:20; 17:6; 24:5), acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor (17:6). Measures taken against the Christians include slander (Acts 13:45), threats (4:21), banning further activity (4:18), incitement of hostility among the population (6:12; 13:50; 17:5; 17:13); hostile house visits (8:3), arrest (4:1; 5:18; 6:12; 9:2; 12:1; 16:19; 21:27), stripping of clothes (16:22), floggings and beatings with rods (5:40; 16:23), stoning (14:19; cf. 14:5), incarceration (4:3; 5:18; 16:23; 23:35), legal proceedings before courts of law (4:7; 5:21, 27; 16:19–21; 24:1–9), paying bail for missionaries (17:9), expulsion (13:50–51; often Paul leaves a city voluntarily), plots to kill or execute (5:33; 9:23–24, 29–30; 20:3; 21:31; 23:12–15; 25:3); killings and execution (7:47–60; 12:1–3). The reactions of Christians to persecution ranges from a courageous defense of their actions (4:8–12, 19; 7:52), legal defense (22:3–21; 24:10–21), explanation of Jesus’ significance (4:10–12), protest (13:51; 16:35–39), continued proclamation of the gospel (4:20, 31; 5:21, 25; 8:4; 13:46; 14:6–7, 21; 16:30–34; 17:1–4), prayer and singing (4:24–31; 12:5; 16:25), and joy (5:41; 13:52) to fear of persecutors (9:13–14), change of travel plans (20:3), flight from a dangerous city (9:23–25; 9:29–30; 14:6; 17:10, 14), and flight into permanent exile (8:1). Each situation is different and requires a different response. In the context of such difficult, often dangerous, sometimes fatal experiences, Peter’s reminder that followers of Jesus are resident aliens who, as God’s elect chosen according to the foreknowledge of God who is and remains their heavenly Father, remain committed to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and to everyday obedience to Jesus Messiah who has procured for them divine forgiveness, and who can and shall experience grace and peace in abundance (1 Pet 1:1–2), is both powerful and comforting.

⁸⁶ Pace Kelhoffer, *Persecution*, 286.