

# 7. MARTYRDOM IN THE LAST DAYS

The tyrant dies and his rule is over,  
the martyr dies and his rule begins.  
Soren Kierkegaard

Martyrdom, like the death of soldiers in a war, is a supreme sacrifice, the giving of one's life for a higher cause. Jesus died for us, and he calls on us to take up our cross and follow him. Paul said: God has given you the privilege not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him (Php 1:29). We naturally shy away from the idea of suffering or dying, even if it is for Jesus' sake, and we may think that God will always protect us, but the fact is that there are about a hundred thousand martyrdoms every year; it's not something that God prevents. At the end of this age, there is going to be a terrible time of suffering for the whole world, and Christians won't be excluded from it.

Much of the suffering will result from warfare and the rise of the most powerful human dictator the world has known, the Antichrist, before Jesus returns to judge the wicked and save the righteous. You may wonder how you could endure martyrdom, but God has promised to be with his people always. He'll give his people the faith and strength to endure. Two things will be a comfort at that time. Firstly, you will not be alone, the whole worldwide Church will be affected, and millions of believers from every people, tribe, language, and nation will be given the choice of worshiping Christ or Satan. And secondly, we fear

death, because it is the end of life, but in this case, death will be quickly followed by resurrection. Our hope for the future depends on our resurrection. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor 15:19). The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed; our resurrection is the beginning of our glorification. As children of God, we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If we share in his sufferings, we'll also share in his glory.

The following are important verses that bear on the probability of our being martyred if we happen to be in the last generation of believers before Christ's return, which is looking increasingly likely.

**Dan 7:21-22** As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them. Then the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the high places, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Daniel is the only OT prophet who predicts the Antichrist's appearance and the persecution of the Church during the Great Tribulation. The Antichrist is the horn (power) who will wage war on the saints and defeat them in the final days before Jesus returns. They will be rewarded after the resurrection with the possession of the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom and will reign with him over the earth. The saints of the high places, or the saints on high, are the saints of the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6).

**Lk 18:7-8** Won't God bring about justice for his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay in helping them? I'm telling you, he'll see that they get justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on Earth?

Jesus did not say a lot about the Church in the last days, because his ministry was to the Jews, but his question in the verse above suggests that the number of his believers alive at the time of his return will be less than expected.

**2 Tim 2:11-12** If we died with him, we'll also live with him. If we endure, we'll also reign with him. If we disown him, he'll also disown us. If we're unfaithful, he'll remain faithful, for he can't disown himself.

Paul confirms that if we die with Christ, we'll live and reign with him. The context suggests that Paul spoke about endurance in suffering and persecution, even martyrdom.

The rest of the Scriptures are from the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which speaks about the things to come at the end of the age.

**Rev 1:9** I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingship and patient endurance we have in Jesus, I was on the island called Patmos for speaking God's word and testifying to Jesus.

Christians are companions of the apostle John in the suffering, kingship, and perseverance that are ours in Jesus. John was imprisoned on Patmos because of his Christian beliefs. He saw many visions concerning the events of the last days, including the Great Tribulation, when God's people will be persecuted and martyred by the Antichrist. He states that we are partners with him in the suffering we endure as Christians on our journey to inheriting the Messianic kingdom.

**Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21** To the victor I'll give ...

In each letter that John writes to the seven churches, Jesus makes a promise to those who overcome and conquer the beast (Rev 15:2) by not submitting to him. He promises them a place in his

government in New Jerusalem from where they'll rule the nations during the millennium.

**Rev 2:10** Don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer. ... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I'll give you life as your victor's crown.

Christians at Smyrna are encouraged to be faithful, even if it means being martyred, and they'll receive eternal life as a reward for their victory. The promise applies to all Christians.

**Rev 2:13** You didn't renounce your faith in me, even at the time when Antipas, my faithful witness/martyr, was put to death in your city, where Satan lives.

Antipas was one of the early martyrs, a faithful witness. The Greek word, *μάρτυς*, means witness or martyr. Martyrdom is a powerful witness for Jesus. Jesus is also called a faithful witness/martyr (1:5, 3:14). Satan is behind all efforts to annihilate Jews and Christians.

**Rev 3:21** To the victor, I'll give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Jesus was victorious when he suffered crucifixion. He ascended to heaven and sat down on God's heavenly throne. Now he promises those who are victorious over the Antichrist that they'll sit with him on his earthly throne.

**Rev 5:5-6** Don't weep! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. ... Then I saw a Lamb standing in the middle of the throne ... looking as if it had been slaughtered.

In the throne-room scene, Jesus, the Lion of Judah, the descendant of King David is described as triumphant, even though he was crucified. His death has resulted in the salvation of millions of souls.

**Rev 5:12** Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise!

No cross, no crown! The Lamb who was slain is worthy to be ascribed all power and glory.

**Rev 6:9-11** I saw under the altar of incense the souls of those who had been slain for speaking God's word and for the testimony they maintained. They called out in a loud voice, saying: How long, Lord, holy and true, until you judge the Earth's inhabitants and avenge our blood? Then each of them was clothed in a white robe and told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants were killed just as they had been.

When the fifth seal was opened, John saw the souls of Christians in heaven who had been slain because they stood by the Bible and did not deny their Lord. The white robes symbolize their righteousness. They are told to be patient until the full number of martyrs are slain, suggesting a large number, as the Antichrist is successfully waging war on the Church.

**Rev 7:14** These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation. They've washed their robes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb.

John sees the souls of a great multitude of people standing before God's throne in heaven. They are tribulation martyrs from all nations and languages. Knowing that they are saved due to Jesus shed blood, they praise and worship God and Jesus.

**Rev 11:7** When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, defeat them, and kill them. Their dead bodies will lie in the public square of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are Jewish Christians who preach for 3 ½ years in Jerusalem. They perform miracles and

have the power to prevent rain from falling. They have the power to pollute water and bring pandemics to Earth. In the middle of the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist comes to Jerusalem and kills these prophets, who after three days come back to life and ascend to heaven. The Antichrist then sets himself up in God's temple and begins his slaughter of God's people.

**Rev 12:11, 17** They triumphed over him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They didn't love their lives even in the face of death. ... Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and maintain their testimony about Jesus.

The Antichrist begins his plan to annihilate Jews, then, when he fails, he turns on Christians, seeking to thwart God's plan for them and the Messianic kingdom. God strengthens his people, and they triumph over the Antichrist, not in a worldly way by fighting him, but by trusting in God and refusing to deny Christ. They embrace death gladly, knowing that the day of resurrection is not far away. They weren't afraid to die. They triumphed over the Antichrist by maintaining their faith in the cross and the power of Jesus' blood, by confessing their allegiance to Jesus, and by choosing to die for Jesus rather than denying him and submitting to the Antichrist's demands.

**Rev 13:5, 7** The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ... He was given power to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation.

Chapter 13 describes the rise of the final world empire (the beast from the sea) and the Antichrist (the beast's leader and mouthpiece). He reigns for 3 ½ years, the final period before Jesus returns, and wages war against the Church in every country of the world.

**Rev 13:10** If you're destined for captivity, into captivity you go. If you're destined to be killed with the sword, with the sword you're killed. This advises the saints to endure and be faithful.

Everybody on Earth will submit to the Antichrist, all except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, genuine Christians who don't deny their allegiance to Christ. Imprisonment and death by a weapon are God's ordained route to victory, so Christians need to understand that and patiently endure the persecution. Their faithfulness to God in the time of persecution will be their victory. The joy of the Lord will be their strength (Neh 8:10).

**Rev 13:15** The second beast was given the power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

The second beast comes from the Earth, a False Prophet who supports the Antichrist. He makes an image of the Antichrist and gives it some form of life so that it speaks and condemns to death those who refuse to worship it.

**Rev 14:1, 4-5** Then I looked, and saw the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ... These are people who didn't defile themselves with women, for they are celibate. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. They are incorruptible and unblemished.

John had a vision of 144,000 Christians, who were to be sealed (Rev 7:1-8). This is a symbolic number (12 x 12 x 1000) representing Israel (12), the Church (12), and a complete number (1000). He sees them standing with Jesus on Mount Zion in fulfillment of Psalm 2:6: I've installed my king on Zion, my holy

mountain. They have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and Jesus, a choice offering, honest and unblemished, and celibate because they are pure and faithful. They didn't worship the Antichrist and they're before God's throne in heaven singing a new song. They are tribulation martyrs, the same people John saw before (Rev 7:1-4, 7:9-17).

**Rev 14:9-13** A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: Those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark on their foreheads or hands will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They'll be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb and the smoke of their torment will rise forever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for those who receive the mark of his name. These circumstances call for patient endurance from the saints who keep God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying: Write this: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they'll rest from their labor, for their deeds follow them.

This is an important warning to the Church that they must endure patiently and not submit to the demands of the Antichrist and the False Prophet. As Satan is the power behind the Antichrist, everyone has to choose whether they'll worship Christ or Satan. There can be no compromise, no receiving of his mark or his name on their bodies. They must remain faithful, even in the face of starvation, imprisonment, or martyrdom, which is not a shame or even a disaster. It will be something to be proud of in the next life, having followed in the Master's footsteps. Those who have genuine faith will find strength in the Lord, and they'll be blessed and rewarded for their devotion; nothing less than ruling the world with Christ during the millennium. The martyrs are described as victors, conquerors, and overcomers.

**Rev 15:2-3** Then I saw what looked like a glassy sea glowing with fire. Standing beside the glassy sea were those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name. They held harps that God had given them and were singing the song of God's servant Moses, and the Lamb's song.

Again, John sees the souls of the victorious tribulation martyrs in heaven. What joy is theirs as they play their musical instruments and sing Moses' song (Deut 31:19, 32:1-43), which celebrates God's dealings with Israel. The Lamb's song, quoting Psalm 86:9, says that all nations will come and worship before the Lord because his righteous acts have been revealed.

**Rev 16:5-6** You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were, for they shed the blood of your saints and your prophets, and you gave them blood to drink as they deserve.

As the bowls of wrath are poured out on an unbelieving world, the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image, an angel declares that they deserve their punishment because they killed his saints and prophets.

**Rev 17:6** I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, that is, the blood of Jesus' martyrs.

The woman is Babylon the Great. She symbolizes the last great world empire, called the mother of prostitutes and detestable things of the earth. She represents godless city life and culture. All the megacities of the world are characterized by opulence, pride, greed, corruption, immorality, and the persecution of God's people. The populations of the great cities of the world will be held responsible for killing the saints during the Great Tribulation, just as Hitler's henchmen were.

**Rev 18:24** In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, that is, all those who have been slaughtered on Earth.

Another reference to the megacity, symbolically called Babylon, in which the saints will be killed. God's advice to the church in verse four is: Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins so that you will not receive any of her plagues.

**Rev 19:2** He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her his servants' blood.

Babylon the Great will fall. All the cities of the world will be destroyed (Rev 16:19) as God takes vengeance on them for killing his servants.

**Rev 20:4** I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their witness for Jesus and God's word. They did not worship the beast or his image or receive his mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

John's final vision of the souls of the tribulation martyrs concerns their resurrection, as verse five makes clear: This is the first resurrection. He said they were beheaded, but this may not be the only method of execution. They were killed because they refused to deny their allegiance to Jesus, and they refused to bow down to the Antichrist or to take his name or mark on their bodies. They were killed because they believed and proclaimed the word of God, the Bible. Although the verse highlights the tribulation martyrs, we should understand that Christians from all ages are heirs of the kingdom and will rule the Earth with Christ for a thousand years.

**Rev 21:7-8** The victor will inherit all this, and I'll be his God and he'll be my son. As for the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolators, and all liars, their place is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur, which is the second death.

The victors are the martyrs who surrendered their lives, but not exclusively; all the redeemed will be included. They'll live in their eternal abode, the holy city called New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God. God will be there with them, and they'll be his children. He'll make all things new, and the martyrs will inherit this new paradise. The unbelievers, on the other hand, are consigned to what is described symbolically as a fiery lake of burning sulfur. For the redeemed, there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away.